

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO *GLAMOUR*:
A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF *REVOLVE: THE COMPLETE NEW TESTAMENT*

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines a new genre in Bible publishing: the “BibleZine,” a combination of the Bible with the formatting and visual elements of a teenage fashion magazine. The first BibleZine, *Revolve: The Complete New Testament*, appeared in the summer of 2003 and sold all of its 40,000 copies in a matter of months. This success has inspired a new line of Bible products, as several follow-up editions of *Revolve* and other BibleZines have flooded the marketplace. While the publisher and editors of *Revolve* claim that their modern creation is meant to inspire young readers to connect with the text of the New Testament, the forceful combining of the two disparate genres has produced an artifact whose form undermines and trivializes biblical content.

The significance of the BibleZine’s message extends beyond its updated magazine format. This thesis uses the theories of Kenneth Burke, George Dillon, Edwin Black, and several other rhetorical critics to reveal and critique the editorial influence found in this “updated” New Testament. The analysis is divided into three chapters that examine specific elements of the carefully orchestrated BibleZine, from the impact of *Revolve*’s prominent magazine-like features to the pseudo-friendships the editors create to influence its young target audience. *Revolve* does not represent a unique way of interpreting the Bible for a new generation. It may look contemporary in its format, but *Revolve* masks a materialistic and highly conservative ideology that will negatively influence its young readers in how they approach matters of identity and spirituality. My analysis will reveal the numerous ways the editors of the BibleZine use and manipulate biblical sanction in order to convey a consumeristic ideology.

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For Emma,
who is everything but a “*Revolve* girl”

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INTRODUCTION: *Revolve* and its Relationship to Rhetorical Study

Revolve: The Complete New Testament is one of the latest ventures from Thomas Nelson, Inc., the self-proclaimed “leading publisher and distributor of books emphasizing Christian, inspirational and family value themes” (Press Release: Nelson Launches) as well as the sixth largest US publisher of books and other published materials (“Costs Force Thomas Nelson Out”). Released in July 2003 by Transit, the teen-publishing division of Thomas Nelson, *Revolve* is described on the company’s website as offering “the perfect solution” to teen estrangement from the Bible. According to its publisher, this 384 page version of the New Testament is “the new look for teen Bible publishing! [...] Teen girls feel comfortable exploring the Scriptures and over 500 further-study notes because of the relevant format!” (Product description: *Revolve*, NCV). The supposed “relevant” format of *Revolve* is that of a “BibleZine” – the combination of a magazine format with the text of the New Testament. Since their initial merging of a magazine format with the Bible, Thomas Nelson now has an established line of several Bible-magazines, each one targeting a different niche market. There is *Refuel*, a companion BibleZine to *Revolve*, but with its audience targeted to teenage boys. There are also the latest issues of *Becoming*, a BibleZine aimed for an audience of young adult women, and *Align*, for young adult men. There is even a BibleZine for an urban, hip-hop culture, entitled *Real*, which features a headline on its cover reading: “Jail Ain’t No Joke.”

According to a September 2003 press release from Thomas Nelson, “*Revolve* is the most innovative thing to happen in Bible publishing in the last 20 years” (Press release: Trendy Guidance). The press release goes on to state that “[t]hrough this new format, teens can learn to approach all of life’s scenarios with Christian beliefs and morals, in a text as fun and easy to read as *Teen People*.” This new approach to marketing the Bible has been a financially successful move for the two-hundred year old publisher Thomas Nelson, Inc., resulting in staggering sales and the printing of several follow-up editions of its premiere BibleZine.

Overlooking the fact that this “Scripture” is now reconstructed with glossy paper and laced with the content of most fashion magazines, there are other, more subtle motives embedded

in the editorial choice of this new, “hip” format. When readers embrace *Revolve*, they implicitly associate the mundane activities of teenage life and beauty routines to the religious disciplines of their faith. The effect of this association is to trivialize the complexities of spiritual engagement. For example, girls are told that “we should read [the Bible] with the same passion we’d have when we read a letter from our biggest crush.”¹ A “crush” connotes a passing infatuation, while a relationship with God is generally associated with life-long commitment. Other statements such as “Remember, the Bible isn’t meant to be difficult” (16) and references to the biblical text as “God’s love letter to us” (174) mimic the style of a superficial teen magazine. The assumptions embedded in these statements diminish the force of the New Testament and reduce it to reading material that is insignificant and trivial, rather than maintaining the Bible’s ethos as a foundational spiritual text.

But in order to understand the full extent of how a Bible-magazine format transforms the character and content of the original biblical text, it is important to compare what the two separate genres represent. The Bible has traditionally been viewed as a source of moral guidance for spiritual questions and as a means for readers to understand a conception of God. Several strands of evangelical Christianity have taken these characteristics a step further, and describe the Bible as a text that is both infallible and inerrant. On the other hand, fashion magazines by their nature present transient and shallow images that encourage the pursuit of materialistic beauty and sexual desirability over all other qualities. These magazines inform their readers of the latest social trends, are obsessed with celebrity culture, and often advise readers of superficial “dos and don’ts”: it is in the nature of the genre to be a disposable medium whose fads and trends are continually updated with each new issue. Conversely, the traditional leather-bound, red-lettered Bible is often seen as a sacred object in and of itself.

The makers of *Revolve* have made these two disparate genres converge in their BibleZine. In doing so, the editors play upon the audience’s past experiences of fashion magazines by transferring them to the text of the Bible. In addition to this transfer, often in *Revolve* the editors assume the same sanction and authority as the Scripture and shift this power over to the content of the recurring special features of the text. Consequently, there is an

¹*Revolve: The Complete New Testament*. New Century Version. Ed. Kate Etue. New York: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2003. 174. Subsequent quotations from this text will be cited in parentheses following the quoted material.

underlying assumption that the opinions expressed in these sidebars (written by the editors) are as true and valid as the biblical text itself.

Throughout the BibleZine, the editors make deliberate choices in how they address certain topics or in their choice of what perspectives to include or exclude in *Revolve*'s extra features. For example, throughout the BibleZine, there is an overt editorial effort to merge elements of the mundane fashion world with that of the spiritual realm. From the in-text cues present in the "Beauty Secrets" segments that correlate washing your face to cleansing your soul, to the "Guys Speak Out" sidebars that describe the "perfect girl," the editors use the familiarity of a magazine to subversively insert messages of what constitutes ideal female behavior. Granted, the Bible has always functioned as an advisory source for readers to consult; yet, in *Revolve*, this function has been transformed and simplified into a contemporary "question-and-answer" format that makes matters of faith commonplace and convenient.

The publisher and editors of *Revolve* claim that they are using the design and features of a teen magazine as means to engage their audience with the biblical text. Repositioning the Bible has been going on for hundreds of years. The Geneva Bible of the sixteenth century, for example, offers an informative point of comparison for the twenty-first century BibleZine. The Geneva Bible "was from the start intended to be a best-seller," due to the efforts of its creators to make the biblical text accessible to a broad audience (Katz 44). In 1560, the Geneva Bible was the first whole Bible in English to use chapter and verse divisions, in addition to being the first published Bible to use easily readable roman type. Its compact size made it easily transportable; it featured illustrations of biblical passages and maps; plus it was affordable enough that most English working families owned a copy. These features helped the Geneva Bible to become the "people's Bible" of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Daniell 291). In fact, its popularity inspired over 140 editions of the Geneva Bible to be printed from 1560 to 1644 (Katz 44).

Yet the most interesting comparison of the Geneva Bible to *Revolve* is in the former's use of marginal annotations. On its title page, the Geneva Bible is said to offer "most profitable annotations on all the hard places" (Daniell 309). In fact, the amount of textual notes in the Geneva Bible helped it to provide a type of "running commentary on the whole Bible" (Daniell 305). Presumably these notes were intended to provide clarification on the biblical text and to help alleviate any reader misunderstandings (i.e., to reduce cultural and intellectual barriers between the reader and the text), but also within these notes are several theological and social

biases. The marginalia of this Bible includes several slants toward Calvinist/Puritan theology and an anti-papal bias, in addition to political commentary on issues of the day (Metzger 348, 350). Theologian Bruce Metzger claims that the marginal notes of the Geneva Bible “exercised a most profound influence on the theological and ecclesiastical history of England and Scotland for the next two or three generations” (352).

If extra-biblical additions to a Bible have the potential to exert such a “profound influence” on its audience, then it is important to study the impact of such insertions. The difference between the marginal notes of the Geneva Bible and the “extra features” of *Revolve* is that the effect of marginalia in the Geneva Bible was not to upstage and displace the biblical content that it glossed. Like its sixteenth-century predecessor, the BibleZine, as marketed by its publisher, features “over 500 further study notes.” Yet rather than providing help “on all the hard places,” *Revolve*’s commentary does not guide young readers into a better understanding of biblical passages. In fact, many of its magazine-like features instead distract the audience away from the text of the New Testament, and promote a materialistic, “worldly” perspective. *Revolve*’s readers are often encouraged to consider the marginalia and features of the BibleZine before regarding any of the biblical verses. This concentrated focus on the editorial commentary positions it in such a way as to overpower and displace the Bible passages it surrounds.

In my examination of *Revolve*, I readily acknowledge its choice of style in its construction as a fashion magazine, but my analysis will extend beyond analyzing these external features to discuss the practical implications behind the editors’ aesthetic choices. In particular, I want to examine how *Revolve*’s audience is led to associate the format and content of an ephemeral and disposable commodity with the enduring and transcendent scriptural text. If one of the core cultural values of *Revolve*’s evangelical audience is a rejection of “worldliness” – a desire to separate themselves from the corrupt values of Hollywood and other non-Christian influences – the materialistic nature of the BibleZine represents a clash between the culture it is targeting (evangelicals) and the culture that the content of its pages represent (the “world”). As part of its definition of “worldliness,” the *Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism* states that “Evangelical suspicions of ‘the world’ and ‘worldliness’ find their biblical warrant in Paul’s injunction to the Romans to ‘be in the world, but not of the world’” (Balmer 766). The materialistic values of the fashion magazine are at odds with the evangelical drive to remain separate from the appeals of “the world.”

To do this type of analysis, I will rely upon the tools of rhetorical criticism. As a discipline, rhetoric is concerned with the ways communication is used to influence an audience – either positively or negatively. The influencing power of rhetoric is addressed by Richard Weaver when he states that in communication, “the listener is being asked not simply to follow a valid reasoning form but to respond to some presentation of reality. He is being asked to agree with the speaker’s interpretation of the world that is” (“Language is Sermonic” 1048). According to its publisher, *Revolve*’s “presentation of reality” concerns the spiritual, yet the BibleZine’s interpretation of reality instead offers its young audience a vision of the Bible and its spiritual lessons that are inextricably linked to lessons of consumerism, fashion statements, and boy talk. Thus, *Revolve*’s version of the Bible is a distorted one which merits a careful examination of its unethical appeals and their consequential effect on readers.

Revolve represents a provocative entry into the realm of religious literature, but more importantly yields insight into the nature of communication. *Revolve* acts as a force in the world that promotes consumerism as sacred practice, and I intend to describe, interpret, and evaluate² how this force is conveyed. After all, a “good critic never studies a particular text simply because it exists but because it promises to tell a story larger than itself” (Hart 25). The “story” of *Revolve* will show the implications of crossing religion with contemporary pop culture; a combination that will have long range effects on its target audience as they form their identities as young women. Yet before I can begin to examine *Revolve*, a brief background of the history and function of rhetoric is necessary. As a discipline, rhetoric will offer critical tools to examine both the overt and subtle appeals found in the BibleZine.

Rhetoric – the study of persuasion – has existed in the western tradition for over 2500 years, beginning in the fifth century B.C.E., in the courts of the Greek colony of Syracuse (Foss, Foss, and Trapp 1). For thousands of years, rhetorical study focused on public communication, and students studied oratory to learn how to deliver the most effective message possible in a variety of circumstances. Traditional definitions of rhetoric emphasize its instrumental function and the power of persuasion in public discourse. Aristotle, for example, saw it as a method for

² Bernard L. Brock and Robert L. Scott streamlined the practice of rhetorical criticism into a process of describing, interpreting, and then evaluating an artifact. They wrote that the construction of a rhetorical discourse “inevitably result[s] in a product that is designed, more or less consciously, to be persuasive. The critic says implicitly, ‘see as I see, know as I know, value as I value.’” From Brock and Scott’s *Methods of Rhetorical Criticism*. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1980. 19.

developing lines of argument, and described it as “the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion” (1355b).

Aristotle not only offered a definition of rhetoric, but he also established many of the foundational principles that are still employed by rhetoricians today. In the thousands of years since Aristotle’s treatise on *Rhetoric*, nearly all rhetorical theorists have built their theories, in some part, upon his initial framework. As Barry Brummett notes, “It would not be too extreme to say that every succeeding rhetorical theory must be read in the shadow of the *Rhetoric* as a continuation of or departure from the views it articulated” (*Rhetorical Theory* 141).

In his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle combined both theory and application. While persuasion may ultimately be the goal, the discipline is not constrained by the success of the persuasive attempt; Aristotle wrote that rhetoric’s “function is not simply to succeed in persuading, but rather to discover the means of coming as near to such success as the circumstances of each particular case allow” (1355b). In other words, rhetoric is found in the intent, and the attempt, to influence an audience.

In all communication, Aristotle argued, a speaker’s persuasive resources are anchored in his or her own character (ethos), the interests and emotions of the audience (pathos), and the substance or quality of the argument itself (logos). Aristotle explained the three methods: “The first kind depends on the personal character of the speaker; the second on putting the audience into a particular frame of mind; [and] the third on the proof, or apparent proof, provided by the words of the speech itself” (1355b). These three elements, known as “artistic proofs,” may be thought of as the ethical, emotional, and logical appeals that combine to provide the persuasive force of a message. Together the three modes of appeal work in ways that “are not static, but dynamic, and are constructed in the very act of [communicating]” (Campbell 136).

In addition to identifying the appeals at work in a message, Aristotle stated that a communication situation will call for a different combination of ethos, pathos, and logos appeals, adapted to best meet the needs of a given audience context. When communicators are able to find the appropriate balance of ethical, emotional, and rational arguments, persuasive communication (and influence) is possible, as “the three work together to make a complete persuasive appeal” (1355b).

While the discipline may have originated solely in the tradition of public oratory, contemporary definitions are broader than Aristotle’s, making rhetoric applicable in any

circumstance where communication takes place. Even so, more contemporary definitions retain Aristotle's original focus, characterizing rhetoric as a "practical art . . . an instrument to aid living" (Brock and Scott 14). As a pragmatic art, rhetoric is also described as being "harnessed to the world" because of its close relationship to an audience and a particular context of communication (Dillon 12).

Thus, the focus of rhetoric remains where it has always been, on discovering the best methods of appealing to an audience, using the tools of language. As Barry Brummett notes, "[n]early every way of understanding *rhetoric* has centered around the idea of *influence*: the ways we use verbal and nonverbal signs to affect other people" (*Rhetorical Theory* 2). Wayne C. Booth echoes this emphasis, writing that rhetoric may be defined as "the entire range of resources that human beings share for producing effects on one another" (*Rhetoric of Rhetoric* xi) while Donald Bryant describes rhetoric's function as the process of "adjusting ideas to people and people to ideas" (404).

The practice of rhetorical criticism is crucial to identifying the rhetorical or suasive underpinnings of an artifact. Theorists Bernard L. Brock and Robert L. Scott describe rhetorical criticism as "a potent social force" (19). This type of criticism helps determine how texts function and, in turn, the many ways messages can influence audiences; it acts as a powerful tool to uncover a text's hidden attitudes, values, and assumptions. It is a systematic process that helps to discern what is really being communicated to the audience, in addition to offering evaluative insights into a communicator's message. Rhetorical criticism uncovers the forces of persuasion by first asking questions about an artifact and then revealing the embedded rhetorical assumptions at work within it.

The critic plays a unique role in the process of rhetorical criticism. Not only must a critic dissect what rhetorical devices are at work within a text, but she must also take the additional step to evaluate the effects of these devices upon the speaker, audience, and underlying message (or the message behind the message) of the discourse. It is not enough to simply label the rhetorical strategies of a text, as the critic is also in the unique place of assessing the implications of how and why these devices function with a particular audience. Thus, the role of rhetorical critics are to be "meaning detectives," whose roles are to "explain what texts mean" by "always looking beneath the surface" of a text (Brummett *Pop Culture* 70,72).

Edwin Black likens the role of the rhetorical critic to a scientist, claiming that both call for “two vitally important activities, which are to see a thing clearly and to record what they have seen precisely” (*Rhetorical Criticism* 4). According to Black, the difference between the two investigative roles is that a critic “seeks to judge the thing justly” rather than abruptly stopping at the fact-finding and verification steps of a scientist (*Rhetorical Criticism* 4). This emphasis on the evaluating of an object is a consistent quality of rhetorical criticism. As a method, it is concerned with assessing the inner-workings of a text, and then discovering how it produces influence upon an audience. Therefore, evaluation can be regarded as the culmination of the critical process, and is the inevitable result of rhetorical criticism. In fact, as Roderick Hart explains, because rhetoric is such a powerful communicative tool, “the good critic cannot be timid . . . [and] cannot shrink from judgment” (30). This evaluative step is the most revealing in the critical process.

Lloyd Bitzer discusses rhetorical criticism’s power in his seminal 1968 article, “The Rhetorical Situation.” Rhetoric is about exerting influence, and Bitzer defines the discipline as the “mode of altering reality, not by the direct application of energy to objects, but by the creation of discourse which changes reality through the mediation of thought and action” (4). Like Aristotle, Bitzer views rhetoric as a pragmatic tool and writes that it “comes into existence for the sake of something beyond itself; it functions ultimately to produce action or change in the world; [and] it performs some task” (4). Rhetoric is an instrument to be used in the crafting of messages with its main function to evoke change, first in the minds of the audience, and then within the world at large. Thus, a speaker will use rhetoric to first involve the audience, and then to motivate them to act. Bitzer describes the audience as functioning as “mediators of change,” whose goal is to modify whatever problem, or exigence, the speaker sets before them (8).

Edwin Black also discusses the shaping power of rhetoric in his article, “The Second Persona”. In the article, Black exposes the forces of identification that are present in all rhetorical discourse and goes on to describe the need for critics to evaluate these artifacts and the implicit ideologies that are present within a text. To do this, he proposes studying the “human dimensions” of a discourse, along with the corresponding “form of character” that often accompanies it (Black *Second Persona* 165). According to Black, a text will often exert a “pull of ideology” that invites its audience not only “to believe something, but to *be* something” (*Second Persona* 172). In terms of audience engagement, Black writes that the enticement of a

rhetoical text is all-encompassing: “We are solicited by the discourse to fulfill its blandishments with our very selves” (*Second Persona* 172). This represents the intention of a speaker to not only persuade his or her audience, but also reveals the underlying attempts to encourage an audience to personally identify with the message.

Black suggests that when evaluating a discourse, the critic should be more attuned to the intentions behind the text rather than only analyzing the text itself. He writes that “[t]his relationship [between a speaker and an artifact] . . . suggests that the association between idiom and an ideology is much more than a matter of arbitrary convention or inexplicable accident” (*Second Persona* 172). Because of this link between a style and an outlook, evaluative critiques can be made – both of a text and the author responsible for it. Black writes that “language has a symptomatic function. Discourses contain tokens of their authors. Discourses are, directly or in transmuted form, the external signs of internal states” (*Second Persona* 162).

Black’s article reflects several assertions made earlier by Richard Weaver in his book *The Ethics of Rhetoric*. Weaver writes that “a single term is an incipient proposition . . . it cannot be denied that single names set up expectancies of propositional embodiment” (211). The words speakers choose help to structure the perspective of their audience, while also revealing their own perspective on a subject. Again, it is this process that makes language’s function not only persuasive, but also transformative. Weaver writes that words have their “potencies,” with some terms possessing a positive “God” or negative “devil” descriptive quality to them (214). Through the process of describing an object or idea, a speaker’s word choice implicitly expresses an attitude which will help to position his or her audience. Weaver foretold Black’s assertions in “The Second Persona,” by emphasizing that a speaker’s ideology can often be exposed through the wording of a text. Therefore, because of the revealing nature of communication, rhetorical critics possess the ability to evaluate and make judgements on discourses because of the appeals (implicit and explicit) made to the audience that expose an author’s intent.

As I examine *Revolve*, the implicit and explicit appeals of the BibleZine will indeed reveal the intentions of its editors. The tools of rhetorical criticism will help add a more comprehensive dimension to my critique. *Revolve*’s fashion magazine format will not merely be viewed as a distraction from reading the biblical text, but as a deliberate method and means of projecting the editors’ ideology onto their readers. Rhetorical criticism encourages the consideration of this influencing effect of communication, and to “think not simply about how

[texts] are put together but rather what they *do* to us” (Booth *Company We Keep* 126). It is that extra influencing step of “what they *do* to us” that makes this type of analysis so necessary.

One of the primary rhetorical tools the editors of *Revolve* employ is the use of enthymemes. Enthymemes are a persuasive form of rhetorical argument that Aristotle regards as the “substance of rhetorical persuasion” and “in general the most effective of the modes of persuasion” (1355a). Specifically, an enthymeme is an argument scheme, or structure, analogous to the formal syllogism, but with a significant difference. Like the syllogism, the enthymeme links a premise to a conclusion by way of a generalized principle. However, whereas the general (or minor) principle is explicitly stated in a syllogism³, the enthymeme leaves it implicit, so that, as Aristotle explained, “the hearer adds it himself” (1357a). The result is a participatory process in which the hearer actually helps to convince herself of the argument, since the link between the premise and conclusion is deliberately left unstated. Because the generalization on which an enthymeme depends is embedded, it is not available for examination, and may even pass unnoticed by a reader as she “fills in the blanks” herself.

An example of an enthymeme is the telling of a joke. Usually jokes are most effective when an audience can follow the speaker’s reasoning and fill in the gaps necessary in order for the joke to be funny. Yet whenever a joke is explained step-by-step, it is not nearly as effective as implicitly following the structure and finding the humor present in these subtle connections; if a joke is fully explained, it often loses its humorous quality. The enthymeme works on these same types of subtle inferences, and helps to construct awareness from what the audience already knows.

The enthymeme is another method, in addition to the three modes of appeal, of adapting messages to accommodate particular audiences. The power of enthymeme lies in its ability to engage the reader and make her complicit in her own persuasion. As James McBurney explains, “the premises which compose an enthymeme are usually nothing more than the beliefs of the audience which are used as causes and signs to secure the acceptance of other propositions”

³ The most famous of these types of argument structures would be Socrates’ three-part syllogism:

(Major premise)	All men are mortal.
(Minor premise)	Socrates is a man.
(Conclusion)	Therefore, Socrates is mortal.

(181). It is the audience involvement that makes an enthymeme such a persuasive tool – if speakers were to expressly explain each step of their argument, it would not be as engaging as having the audience contribute to the argument themselves.

All arguments employ enthymematic structures, to a certain extent. My examination of *Revolve* will reveal the specific types of enthymematic arguments and corresponding editorial assumptions that are at work in the BibleZine’s appeals to its audience. My analysis will emphasize that one of the largest enthymematic appeals at work in *Revolve* is the correlation of a consumer-driven worldview to that of a spiritual, which is primarily accomplished in the use of the fashion-magazine format. I have broken down my examination of *Revolve* into three chapters of analysis, with the level of examination increasing as the thesis progresses.

Chapter One will discuss the implications behind the format and presence of *Revolve*’s numerous extra features, a perception that is at the expense of the surrounding biblical text. By recasting the Bible as a teen fashion magazine, the editors of *Revolve* are relying upon the enthymematic appeals of a magazine arrangement in order to relate its message to the audience. They may have stated that their intentions behind making the Bible a fashion magazine is to “sho[w] girls that the Bible is fun, that there’s a positive connotation with the Bible,” but it is clear that the structure or formatting of a text can also have an influencing effect on the way an audience perceives a message (Tennant).

The theory that corresponds to this principle is rhetorical form. When an audience recognizes a particular format, they will participate in the message by transmitting the expectations and assumptions that its specific form entails. When a speaker manipulates the appeal of familiarity of rhetorical form, it helps to overcome any potential audience resistance to ideologies that are being presented in a discourse. Kenneth Burke defines form as the “arousing and fulfillment of desires” in a text (CS 124). Form is at work when a text is arranged in such a way that it leads a reader to expect certain properties or parts to follow; in this case, form functions as a type of enthymeme, and in the case of *Revolve*, the reader makes her own subtle connections as she engages the BibleZine content. In fact, form is one of *Revolve*’s most effective appeals: the restructuring of the Bible as a magazine is what has made the product so successful in the youth market. The publishers and editors unabashedly manipulate the pathos appeals inherent in the fashion magazine form in order to pander to a target audience of teenage girls.

Revolve relies upon several assumptions related to the Bible and spirituality, and as a result, there are implicit, enthymematic arguments within the text that my analysis will reveal. *Revolve*'s concept of spirituality is one example of the most prevalent assumptions found in the Biblezine. On their website, the publisher of *Revolve* has proclaimed their product as "the new look for teen Bible publishing!" (Product description: *Revolve*, NCV). In reality, what they have produced is just another teen magazine product that manipulates the religious auspices of the Bible, a slick move that shows they consider spirituality (and scripture itself) as just another trend or teenage fad, ready to be sold to another consumer. As result, the audience transfers their enthymematic expectations of the secular *CosmoGirl!* and *Seventeen* to the text of the Bible – but reading the Bible should be a different experience than simply reading another fashion magazine. Yet as audiences encounter the pages of the BibleZine, they must be willing to accept any sacrifice made to the biblical text, in order for it to be presented as a fashion magazine.

Revolve also uses the rhetorical power of influence through the relationship it builds between the writer and reader of the BibleZine. By relying on the form of a fashion magazine, *Revolve* incorporates a "Blab" question-and-answer column where, presumably, readers submit various questions for the editors' advice. Chapter Two takes this particular feature, and examines the levels of a mock relationship that is forged between *Revolve*'s readers and editors. The recurring advice column offers an interesting artifact to examine the relational complexities of the speaker and audience dynamic at work within the BibleZine. Particularly, the rhetorical concept of footing will be the tool I use in Chapter Two to analyze the different appeals that take place within the column.

The concept of rhetorical footing is described in George Dillon's book *Rhetoric as Social Imagination: Explorations in the Interpersonal Function of Language*. Dillon defines the use of footing as "textual strategies" that help plot the emerging relationship between the writer and reader of a text – specifically within advice-giving situations (19). Footing concerns appropriateness and context – particularly in the relationship that is formed between the speaker, audience, and message – the recurrent trio that evokes earlier references to Aristotle's modes of persuasion. In order for advice to be persuasively successful, a relationship between the writer and reader must be carefully crafted and maintained. The roles of writer and reader are not fixed or "set in advance," but rather "are adjusted constantly as the discourse proceeds and may be altered for various reasons" (Dillon 16).

Footings also function as “somewhat metaphorical vectors of approach and distance or aggression and ingratiation” that can be defined and measured through a textual analysis (Dillon 17). Dillon provides a continuum of footing stances a communicator can choose, with styles ranging from impersonal/personal, distant/solidary, superior/equal, confrontive/oblique, to formal/informal. With each chosen stance, the writer of a discourse intentionally scripts a position (or role) for his or her reader to follow. The Blab feature, with its explicit advice-giving format, offers *Revolve*’s editors the opportunity to position the “voice” of the magazine as an intimate confidant whose counsel the readers seek. This authorial connection to the audience in *Revolve* is essential, because the writers want to influence their audience’s attitudes and preferences.

While the editors of *Revolve* may claim that they are making the Bible more “relevant” for their teenaged audience, the text they have produced reveals otherwise. My final chapter of analysis will examine the intricacies of *Revolve*’s wide-range of influence, particularly in terms how the BibleZine helps shape the audience’s identity as they seek spirituality. To do this, I will use Kenneth Burke’s theories of identification and courtship to show that the values of *Revolve* are communicated using unbalanced rhetorical appeals, several devices of propaganda, in addition to several other unethical methods.

Burke writes that identification helps the critic to “[show] how a rhetorical motive is often present where it is not usually recognized, or thought to belong”; therefore, Burke’s theory will give my analysis its final push toward revealing the true message behind the genre of BibleZines (RM xii). Identification represents a more intimate facet of persuasion – the attempt to overcome the division, or separateness, human beings often feel from one another. Initially, the separation is most notable between the young audience and their fear of traditional Bible formats. Thus, when the editors of *Revolve* released their “updated” modern Bible, it could be perceived as an editorial attempt to help scale the estrangement typically found between teens and scripture. Hierarchically, the editors position themselves in a spiritual level above their readers, and then guide their audience of young teens into embracing a particular ideology; presumably, this is done to help the teens scale the ladder toward the top – which in this case, means into a better relationship with God. Yet, in reality, the BibleZine shows more of an editorial attempt to steer readers toward an opposite goal: the pinnacle of consumerism. *Revolve* represents an editorial attempt to encourage its audience of young girls to identify with an

editorially crafted image of what is proper and right (ie., a “*Revolve* girl”), particularly when it comes to being spiritual.

At first glance, reading *Revolve* may seem like an innocuous pastime for young religious girls – but in reality, the vision of spirituality it represents is one that will have implications far beyond a mere spiritual fad. My thesis will present an ethical critique on the enduring impact of formatting a Bible as a fashion magazine. The influence of *Revolve* found in its formatting, its relational appeals, and the ways it attempts to condition its reader shows it to be a discourse that is rhetorically unbalanced and dangerous. Marshall Gregory, in his defense of ethical criticism, warns that when an audience thinks it does not need “to employ their critical powers because they are ‘merely being entertained,’ then it follows that those are the very moments when their sympathies, feelings, and moral judgments are most vulnerable to influence.” I hope that my examination will demonstrate many of the repercussions involved with marketing a Bible as a magazine.

CHAPTER ONE: Aiming the “Arrows of Desire”: The Visual and Formal Appeals of a BibleZine

Revolve’s popularity with its teenaged audience relies heavily on its construction as a fashion magazine. In the Bible-magazine’s product description, Thomas Nelson, Inc., the publisher of *Revolve*, touts the modernized New Testament: “After discovering that teens don’t read the Bible, Thomas Nelson found that teens do read magazines! Thus, the idea to put the Bible in a magazine format with the purpose of showing teens that the Bible could be relevant and understandable” (Product description: *Revolve* #2). The publisher knows that teenagers enjoy reading magazines, so in an effort to become more “relevant,” the ancient biblical text was transformed to a contemporary format. Presumably, the publisher and editors of *Revolve* hope that the familiar layout of a fashion magazine will lure girls into reading the Bible, a text that they would not normally encounter or embrace.

So far, it’s been a publishing success. Once touted as the “No. 1 selling Bible in America,” *Revolve* has not only been run to several new editions,¹ but has also helped inspire a new product line in Christian publishing – the “BibleZine” – as other Christian publishers rush to imitate and release their own remodeled Bibles² (“Bible Magazines”). The development of this

¹Since I began my research in late 2003, *Revolve* has expanded its product line with Thomas Nelson to include: New Testament translations available in English or Spanish, a line of devotional books (“*Revolve* Devos”) and study guides, an audio devotional CD, a “Wisdom Literature” issue of *Revolve* that includes the Old Testament books of Psalms and Proverbs, in addition to semi-annual editions of *Revolve: The Complete New Testament*. For more information on the *Revolve* product line, see Thomas Nelson’s online catalog: <<http://www.thomasnelson.com/consumer/SearchResults.asp?stype=title&q=revolve>>. Accessed July 10, 2008.

²For example, Zondervan, another major Christian publishing house, released a counterpart to *Revolve*: the *True Images* Bible. A few of the features of *True Images* include: 24 quizzes, including a quiz about “The Perfect Date”; a feature entitled “Reflections from the Other Side,” with teenage boys giving their input on various topics; 100 different “Love Notes from God”; and many other editorial insertions that reflect the same “modern” mentality of *Revolve*. For more information on the *True Images* Bible, visit its website

new genre has helped Nelson Bibles to establish itself as “a cutting edge Bible publisher with the release of their BibleZine(TM) line of Bibles” (“Nelson Bibles Releases Innovative New Product”). In August of 2003, within the first eight weeks of its initial printing, *Revolve* sold over 40,000 copies; a second printing of 120,000 hit the shelves the following month (Winston 32). Later marketing estimates confirmed the “surprise [nationwide] hit” and showed that a mere six months after its second six-figure printing, *Revolve* had “all but sold out” (“How the Good Word Became Girl Talk”). *Revolve*’s “unprecedented interest” shocked both Christian publishing houses and non-religious marketplaces such as Barnes & Noble (“For God’s Sake”). The Bible publishing industry typically considers sales of 40,000 Bibles in one year as a success, so the record-setting sales that *Revolve* accomplished within months of its first appearance on the market gathered considerable media and market interest.

Kate Etue, a senior editor of *Revolve*, has described the response to *Revolve* as “amazing,” bragging that it has garnered “the most response of anything we have published in the last four years” (“Book Publisher: Amazing Response”). *Revolve*’s success and appeal to a teenage audience undoubtedly has to do with the direct imitation of a typical teen fashion magazine in its appearance and content. Etue defends the magazine style as merely “a way to address topics that we knew were important to the teens . . . [but with] a spiritual twist on what they would find in their normal ‘Seventeen’ magazines.” However, there is a more profane motive for the chosen format: profit. *Revolve*’s publication success helped Thomas Nelson, Inc.’s net income rise above \$7.7 million dollars in 2003, up 74% from the year before (“Thomas Nelson Reports 61% Gain”). In addition, the BibleZine’s focus on an audience of 12-to 15-year-old girls is in large part a marketing ploy; “tween” and teen audiences are growing in importance as marketers continue to target them in order to secure future brand loyalty and purchasing (Cohen 9). No wonder this target audience is important to marketers, as a recent study found that teenagers spend upwards to \$172 billion annually (Einstein 9). Etue has explicitly acknowledged that “the Christian-book industry needs this [teenaged] segment; otherwise, in a few years they won’t have anyone shopping in their stores” (“For God’s Sake” 62).

<<http://www.trueimagesbible.com/>> or <<http://www.zondervan.com/Cultures/en-US/Product/Bible/Feature+True+Images.htm>>. Accessed July 10, 2008.

Bible publishing is but one facet in a competitive marketplace, where religious publishing and products make \$6.8 billion annually (Einstein 6). Thus, the repackaging of the Bible is big business in the publishing world; in 2005, “Americans purchased some 25 million Bibles [...] the amount of spent annually on Bibles has been put at more than half a billion dollars” (Radosh 60). In fact, “there is no product of the Christian culture industry that is more effectively exploited and marketed than the Good Book” (Lott 48). The traditional leather-bound Bible has now been replaced by the glossy updated editions of *Revolve*, along with several companion BibleZines, including *Refuel* (for teenage boys), *Becoming* (for college-age women), or any of the other specialized BibleZines that now adorn bookshelves across North America.

Another editor of *Revolve*, Laurie Whaley, hailed the Bible’s new look, stating: “[t]he black and burgundy leather Bible became a staple, and everybody thought that’s what a Bible looks like . . . but I think there’s been this evolution that it doesn’t have to look like my grandma’s Bible” (Winston 32). Indeed, *Revolve* looks nothing like “grandma’s Bible”; rather, it reflects a new aesthetic sensibility in its transformation of the sacred text. In its mimicking of the appearance of a teen fashion magazine, the spirituality represented in *Revolve* is one motivated more by transient, consumeristic values than by any of the enduring, intrinsic values of a traditional religious text. Joanne M. Swenson argues that such “aesthetic values have become as important as utility in shaping the products and places of today” – particularly when concerned with the culture and mentality of modern evangelicalism (566). She mentions that *Revolve* is an “exemplar of this new aesthetic intentionality” and that “evangelicals are now younger, distributed beyond the terra firma of the Bible belt, more affluent, and more immersed in consumer culture and its aesthetics” (Swenson 566 and 569). In fact, “perhaps more than any other aspect of Christian pop culture, Bible publishing in the twenty-first century embodies the intersection of faith and consumerism that defines contemporary American evangelicalism” (Radosh 61). Culturally, *Revolve* comes from the North American evangelical tradition. Today’s evangelical movement “emerged in the 1940’s and 50’s as a middle way between what many Christian leaders perceived as theological liberalism in the mainline Protestant denominations and the cultural separatism of the fundamentalist movement” (Luo). One characteristic of evangelical culture that is relevant to my examination of *Revolve* is the evangelical commitment to the authority of Scripture.

Today's evangelical culture can trace its roots back to the Reformation's "sola scriptura" movement. The Latin *sola scriptura* translates as "from the Scriptures alone," and its principles were integral in the theological movement of the Reformation (Horton). To hold a sola scriptura position is to believe that the Bible self-interprets, and needs no interpretation outside of the words of the actual text. This movement sought to limit the influence of outside help in understanding the biblical text, and distinguished Protestants in their rejection of priestly intermediaries. Additionally, this belief also elevated the Bible to be the final authority in matters of faith and practice. While *Revolve* claims to maintain the authority of the Bible, it is obvious that the extra features of the BibleZine go against the roots of the sola scriptura movement. Instead of encouraging the young readers of *Revolve* to engage with the biblical text on their own, the audience is continually drawn to embrace the extra-biblical features of the BibleZine – either implicitly by their bold visual allure or explicitly by editorial direction.

There are consequences when formatting and marketing a spiritual message as a fashion magazine, which is, by nature, trendy rather than lasting, disposable rather than permanent, current rather than transcendent. Since updated issues of *Revolve* appear every 12 to 18 months, whenever readers eagerly accept the format of the BibleZine, they also embrace the idea that the Bible is no longer the staid, foundational text of their faith, but just is another text that can be updated and re-released according to a changing culture. The legacy of the traditional family Bible that is passed onto future generations, does not apply when a scriptural text is transformed into the ephemeral qualities of a fashion magazine. So what will become of the past issues of *Revolve*, once the "new and improved" issues hit the newsstand? It is doubtful the lifespan of an issue of *Revolve* will last longer than the time it takes to produce another updated issue.

According to *Revolve*'s online product description, the BibleZine contains "over 500 further-study notes" which are touted as "relevant" additions intended to help "teen girls feel comfortable exploring the Scriptures" ("Product Description: *Revolve*, NCV). It is well that these study notes illuminating the scriptural text are referred to prominently in the product description, since they are all but invisible in *Revolve*, appearing in a diminutive 6-point font at the very bottom of the page. Yet what *is* highly visible are the BibleZine's recurring features, which are larger, more colorful and visually appealing than the smaller black and white font in which the biblical text is presented. Needless to say, despite editorial claims, *Revolve*'s extra features cannot guide the reader in embracing the scriptural text in a "relevant" way, since their visual

effect clearly upstages the biblical content. Instead, the colorful prominence given to these features encourages readers to regard *Revolve* first as a magazine, before ever perceiving it as another version of the Bible, if indeed they even do so. The structure of these extra features is such that they overwhelm the biblical text, becoming prominent as figure while the scripture functions as ground, a mere backdrop.

The active role of figure and ground in rhetorical discourses is addressed by Robert E. Tucker in his article “Figure, Ground and Presence: A Phenomenology of Meaning in Rhetoric,” in which he resurrects the earlier theories of Chaim Perelman and the notion of rhetorical presence. Perelman, Tucker argues, regards the world as “infinitely complex and essentially ambiguous” with an “avalanche of stimuli” that requires us to “make the dash of information into familiar shapes and patterns” in order to cope in our symbolic environment (408). In other words, in order to make sense of the barrage of information and images we face on a daily basis, we must invariably privilege certain meanings over others – supporting the idea that the interpretation of the world around us is an essentially selective process, with some meanings given prominence over others.

In the case of *Revolve*, the textual layout of the Bible-magazine highlights the words of the extra features over the words of the biblical passages. The BibleZine format was presumably created to encourage girls to read the Bible; yet instead of drawing readers into the biblical passages, their attention is diverted to the prominent sidebars that offer interpretations of the Bible in accordance with the opinions of *Revolve*’s editors and publisher. Naturally the eye is drawn to these features, with the result that many of the surrounding biblical verses are overlooked or ignored by readers. Many of these eye-catching sidebars are either editorial interpretations of biblical passages or various forms of advice for girls to embrace. Because of the visual attraction of these magazine-like features, the reference point for spiritual meaning becomes the fashion magazine format itself, and not the meaning of the biblical passages it glosses. Thus, *Revolve*’s marginal notes and commentary have become the focus of this New Testament, rather than supplementing any of the biblical passages they surround.

When an editor was asked about the prominence given to these additional features, she responded “I think we’ve elevated [the Bible] to a new level of showing its relevance . . . The actual Scripture is black and white, and everything else is in color” (Foust). This comment exposes the editor as disingenuous; she must know that the blocks of color assign a vivid

presence to the extra features at the expense of the biblical text. While *Revolve*'s editors contend their text raises the Bible to a "new level of relevance" for teens, in fact what they have produced reveals the opposite; the different sidebars reveal a visual presence that privileges them at the expense of the biblical text.

The theory that corresponds to this visual effect is that of figure and ground. Originally articulated by Edgar Rubin, a Danish psychologist in the early twentieth century, figure and ground is a part of the "perceptual process [that] involves differentiating a figure from its background and isolating the related parts of the figure" (Wade 2). Rubin illustrated his theory using the picture of a vase which seemed to illustrate two separate pictures simultaneously: either the viewer notes a vase in the middle of the picture, or views two profiled faces.

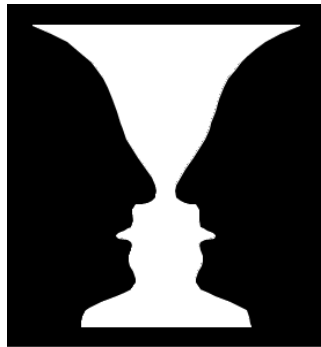


Figure 1 Rubin Vase, from James A. Ferwerda, "Perceiving Pattern and Shape" (Rochester: Center for Imaging Science, Rochester Institute of Technology, 2000) <<http://www.graphics.cornell.edu/~jaf/projects/pn/form.html>> Accessed August 31, 2008.

A crucial element of figure-ground theory is that only one interpretation (or viewing) of an object is possible at one time. Attention is first directed to those features designated as the figure, with everything else fading into the (back)ground. So, when viewing figure/ground images like the example of a Rubin vase, "observers do not see both [images] at once. At first, only one is seen, and the other is simply not evident. Then the other profile comes into view, and the first one becomes less evident" (John M. Kennedy 87).

The implication of this theory is that we cannot give simultaneous attention or interpretation to multiple elements of a text. This "once-at-once-ness" quality and singularity of interpretation mean that "any act of interpretation hinders the other available interpretations from

emerging” (Tucker 399). Therefore, the rhetorical presence and vividness of the extra features in *Revolve* undoubtedly influences its readers, but it does so subversively.

Tucker defines rhetorical presence as “a property of ‘standing-out-ness’ that rhetors give to particular meanings at the expense of others” (406). Presence, then, is a quality of vividness that shapes the perspective of an audience and focuses their attention on an item or an element as the figure, reducing the environment that surrounds it to the status of mere background. The marketing genius of a BibleZine is its borrowing of the authority and sanction usually accorded to the Bible in order to confer a similar weightiness to the additional features that are scattered throughout the text. At the same time that these teen-magazine features gain authority from their association with the Bible, the biblical text itself suffers a loss of status when these “extras” are given a visual prominence over the biblical text. Apparently, once *Revolve*’s marketing function has been fulfilled, the biblical text can safely be disregarded, an attitude that is encoded in the design of the magazine’s textual features and subtly encouraged in the readers.

According to Tucker, when an object achieves this sense of presence, persuasion becomes possible. The “practical implication” of presence essentially means that “people act on what they perceive. To help the audience ‘see’ the world in a particular way is to move them towards action” (Tucker 397). The girls reading *Revolve* are shown the world not through a biblical lens, but through the lens provided by the visually and textually prominent sidebars, quizzes, “Blab” columns, and makeup advice. They cannot help but absorb the lessons and statements found in these extra features before considering what the New Testament actually states, since as Tucker stated, “[w]hat we commonly call the meaning of a text is an impression created in the wake of our experience of it” (407). The presence of these additional features gives the editors a special positioning to implement whatever message they would like to communicate by both borrowing from and marginalizing the authority of the Bible.

The success and implications of the particular aesthetic appeals of *Revolve* are ones that deserve careful examination: what is it about this product that makes it so appealing to its teenaged audience? The editors and publisher of *Revolve* have explicitly stated that their intentions are to make the Bible appear “less freaky” and have therefore aggressively transformed the Bible into a product that will appeal to their audience (Solomon). While the teen-magazine form of *Revolve* is meant to draw young readers to scripture by engaging its message in a supposedly “relevant” way, in reality, the format of a BibleZine dominates and

upstages biblical content, actually distracting readers away from biblical passages. If the biggest draw of *Revolve* is found in its magazine format, then it is important to examine the reasons why this format is so appealing and how its influence is affecting its target audience.

But before examining the influence *Revolve* has on its readers, it is necessary to understand the differences between critiquing an object's format versus examining the rhetorical form it takes. Format refers to "the way in which something is presented" ("Format"). To study an object's format is to simply analyze its arrangement or structural features. Undoubtedly, the format of *Revolve* is that of a fashion magazine: its structure offers colorful features, pictures of airbrushed models, beauty tips and various quizzes. There is no denying that the editors are mimicking the arrangement of magazines, right down to their paper choice of glossy newsprint.

The study of an object's form, however, goes beyond the structural analysis of an artifact to examine the "psychological *relationship* between the artwork, viewer and artist" (Wolin 42). As rhetorical theorist Kenneth Burke explains in his book *Counter-Statement*, form works as a powerful rhetorical device. He defines form as the "arousing and fulfillment of [the audience's] desires. A work has form in so far as one part of it leads a reader to anticipate another part, to be gratified by the sequence" (Burke CS 124). Here is where the difference between format and form lies – the study of form includes examining the influencing effect a format can have on an audience. While an examination of the form of an artifact may partially include a study of its structural features, examining an artifact's form also invites a more in-depth analysis of the audience, noting how their wants and desires are guided and shaped through their experience with the text. As critic Robert Heath puts it, "[form] is audience-oriented; the quality of form is not merely intrinsic to the work nor does it rely upon the mastery of explicit design. It requires the arousal and satisfaction of reader expectations" (Heath 65).

Understanding the subtle difference between format and form can best be illustrated through a few examples. We all encounter familiar formats and the pull of rhetorical form in everyday life. For example, if you turn on the television and see someone behind a desk reporting on local stories and weather, you will recognize the program's format as a news broadcast. The form of the newscast will lead the viewer to expect factual accuracy and reliability of the subjects discussed on the program. On the other hand, if the next channel features a show with various characters acting out comedic situations with a laugh track playing in the background, you recognize a different, though equally familiar, kind of viewing

experience that raises its own set of program expectations. While a news broadcast will lead the viewer to anticipate objectivity and trust in the way subjects are dealt with, a sitcom format implies entertainment, leading the viewer to expect situational exaggeration rather than reliability. In a similar way, a mystery novel will raise different reader expectations than a science textbook. Each genre (or format) imposes different audience anticipations or expectations of its form to be fulfilled.

In the same way, the editors and publisher of *Revolve* have used the appeals of rhetorical form to their benefit when repackaging the Bible as a teen magazine. They have taken a text that their audience originally perceived as both ambiguous and unappealing and have cloaked it in a format that is at once recognizable and comfortable. The girls in the target audience immediately accept *Revolve* because its structure resembles that of most magazines they have already encountered. The claim of the publisher is that because of this visual recognition, girls will be more eager to read and embrace the New Testament. But in choosing to present the Bible as a fashion magazine, the implications of form in this format will have long-lasting consequences in how their audience approaches spirituality. The rhetorical form of *Revolve* illustrates how the visual appeal of a fashion magazine arrangement not only trivializes the content of the New Testament, but also raises and fulfills certain expectations in the reader that may run counter to the text. So, in addition to meeting teenaged girls' shallow expectations of a trendy magazine, *Revolve's* readers also may conform themselves to fit into the BibleZine's superficial realm of spirituality.

Kenneth Burke wrote that a form involves "the creation of an appetite in the mind of the auditor, and the adequate satisfying of that appetite" (CS 31). The question is, what kind of appetite does *Revolve* inspire in the minds of its target audience? A crucial element of rhetorical form is that it will exploit and fulfill audience expectations – in fact, a "form must never lose sight of its audience" in order for it to remain effective (CS 37). In the case of *Revolve*, the biblical text has further been overlaid with content typical of a teen magazine: fashion advice, advice columns, "top ten" lists, and segments purporting to reveal "what guys want." While the use of this type of recognizable form will presumably help the audience understand *Revolve's* message more effectively, this attraction of familiarity also helps to overcome any potential audience resistance to the editorial interpretations of the biblical text that are being presented in *Revolve's* many extra features. Form is not simply aesthetically appealing, however; it is also

powerfully persuasive. The twin processes of anticipation and participation that arise from familiar forms actually help to engage the audience in their own persuasion. Once an audience recognizes a particular style or format, they are conditioned to anticipate certain associated qualities, creating a sense of involvement with the text. It is these two qualities that characterize the rhetorical power of form – anticipation and participation (MacLennan “Course Notes”).

A familiar form is anticipatory in that it creates expectations in the reader that the text itself will fulfill. Indeed, the audience not only anticipates, but *desires* the fulfillment of their formal expectations, as Burke explains when he writes that in form, “the arrows of our desires are turned in a certain direction, and the plot follows the directions of the arrows” (CS 124). When a familiar form is encountered and recognized, the audience’s expectations are shaped toward a particular outcome, without which they will feel thwarted. The ready embrace of a familiar form means that it can carry implicit content and assumptions that an audience might reject if they were made explicit. It is recognition of this power that led Marshall McLuhan to observe that “the medium is the message” (28).

Form is also participatory in that it involves the reader in the making of its meaning. In this sense, form can be said to be enthymematic in nature. Form guides not only the expectations but also the responses of the audience – making the reader a producer as much as a consumer of meanings (Henderson 128). The reader anticipates fulfillment of her formal expectations, and participates in that fulfillment, implicitly accepting content along with form. This effect is not accidental; as Richard Gregg explains, “by the act of forming, the materials are rendered comprehensible and are comprehended” (Gregg 119).

Burke categorized form as progressive, repetitive, conventional, and minor/incidental (CS 124). Progressive form is subdivided into two groups: syllogistic or qualitative progressions. Syllogistic progression occurs when the text systematically follows an explicit succession, step by step; Burke described this progression as syllogistic “because, given certain things, certain things must follow, the premises forcing the conclusion” (CS 124). Qualitative progression is subtler than syllogistic, and rather than elements appearing in a highly structured argument, qualitative progression is more of “a matter of one quality preparing us for another” (Gregg 131). Repetitive forms continually resurface in a text as the “consistent maintaining of a principle under new guises” (Burke CS 125). In minor or incidental forms, various grammatical and stylistic devices work together to convey a consistent theme: examples of these devices could be

metaphor, paradox, contraction, or chiasmus. These three qualities of form culminate in a text as “expectations are created during the interaction of an audience with a work” (Gregg 131).

Conventional form functions differently than the other three types – Burke wrote that “whereas the anticipations and gratifications of progressive and repetitive form arise *during the process* of reading, the expectations of conventional form may be *anterior to* the reading” (Burke CS 126-27). In other words, conventional form involves a reader’s recognition and appreciation of the form before encountering the actual text. So when girls pick up the latest issue of *Revolve*, they recognize the form of it as a magazine and bring to their reading of the New Testament the expectations normally associated with teen magazines. This is because the appeal of conventional form stems from the form itself: “when a form appeals *as form*, we designate it as conventional” (Burke CS 126). Burke labeled this effect a “categorical expectancy” (CS 126). The sense of expectation is greater in conventional forms, because the audience literally expects – even demands – certain qualities of a text purely because of the way it is formulated.

While *Revolve*’s magazine format encompasses several characteristics of the four different types of formal appeals, without a doubt it relies most strongly on the audiences’ attraction to conventional form. From the headlines on its front cover to the choice of glossy paper, *Revolve* borrows much of its audience appeal from other magazines that are readily available to its target audience. Since “the main function of [f]orm is to allow us to gratify appetites,” *Revolve* is constructed in such a way as to satisfy the audiences’ desires that are usually inspired by reading such secular texts such as *Seventeen* or *Glamour* magazines (Blakenship, Murphy, and Rosenwasser 85).

The connection between the figure and ground theories of Robert Tucker and the implications of conventional form, as described by Kenneth Burke, is clear. These theories not only illustrate the reasons why *Revolve*’s readers so eagerly embrace the magazine format, but also establish why it is important to examine the implied messages and values also found in the reading of the BibleZine. There is a deliberate structuring to *Revolve*, where the magazine-like extra features become the most attractive to the BibleZine audience, hence becoming the prominent figure in the reading, with end result of the actual biblical text being reduced to the ground. It is this subtle process that positions *Revolve* to have a maximum impact in transmitting the message of the publisher/editors to their audience of young readers. For the rest of the chapter, I will examine how the draw of figure/ground and conventional form surface in the

BibleZine, which in turn exploits the desires and expectations of the audience toward a predetermined end.

Typically, fashion magazines are filled with superficial articles devoted primarily to promoting beauty advice, trendy fashions, and celebrity gossip. A litter of product advertisements throughout the magazine often implicitly encourages its audience toward materialistic consumption, while the repeated images of perfected models reinforce an unattainable standard of beauty. A fashion magazine assumes, and encourages, a consumer mentality and an ethic based on superficial values like appearance or behavior, values in which its readers are both explicitly and implicitly instructed. Thus, when the Bible is conflated with a fashion magazine, its message cannot help but be reduced to mere fashion: a consumable and disposable commodity.

A quick survey of one of *Revolve*'s secular counterparts, *CosmoGirl!*, reveals several formal elements that the BibleZine emulates. A sample issue of *CosmoGirl!* features several sections on beauty ("Hair, Makeup and Fitness"), five in-text quizzes, four monthly activity calendars, an advice column ("Now What?"), two separate sections of male perspectives ("He Says/She Says" and "Guys Uncensored"), and a number of checklists for readers to consider in preparation for their prom. Such features are standard fare in teen fashion magazines.

Yet these same formal expectations are met and satisfied as readers skim through *Revolve*, a New Testament. From the makeup/beauty tips, the question and answer columns, to countless pictures of airbrushed beauties, the most prominent features of this "Bible" are consistent with the other magazines teenaged girls encounter every day. The audience's embracing of this conventional form is enthymematic; the reader wholeheartedly embraces the magazine format (along with the implicit ideologies associated with the form) as carefully orchestrated by the editors who put the BibleZine together.

A quick comparison of the headlines of *CosmoGirl!* and *Revolve* show the extent of these similarities and reveal the BibleZine's reliance on conventional form. A sampling of the headlines on *CosmoGirl!* read:

Wow! 936 Ways to Look Amazing for Prom

Guys' Most Mortifying Prom Moments!

5 Fun Quizzes to Get You Psyched!

Inside! 4-Month Prom Calendar!

Get Toned in 2 Weeks!

Compare those headlines to ones listed on *Revolve*'s front cover:

“Are You Dating a Godly Guy?” and other Quizzes

Beauty Secrets You’ve Never Heard Before!

Guys Speak Out on Tons of Important Issues

100+ Ways to Apply Your Faith

200+ Blab Q & A’s

Clearly, *Revolve*'s headlines mimic their secular counterparts. The key words in the BibleZine's headlines – “beauty,” “quizzes,” “dating,” “guys” – are all words or themes that are encountered on the cover of any contemporary teen magazine for girls; however, few of these magazines would claim to be religious texts or to offer spiritual guidance. Additional appeals are found in the exclamatory statements and numerical promises of the “200+ Blab Q&A’s” and “100+ Ways to Apply Your Faith.” As readers skim the cover of *Revolve*, they are already being conditioned to transfer their expectations of a conventional magazine to the Bible – a book that normally would be expected to evoke a more reverent attitude. It is this manipulation of a “categorical expectation” that merits a more careful examination of the effects *Revolve* has on its vulnerable target audience of young girls.

The layout and design of *Revolve* are such that the readers' choice of what features to attend to is tightly constrained. Once the “extra features” snap into prominence, an alternate reading becomes unlikely. While the editors' stated intention is to inspire young girls to read the Bible, what they are doing instead is cultivating their vision of a “*Revolve* girl” (265), a vision with potentially far-reaching social and political implications as young women are conditioned to passivity and a view of self-worth that extends no further than physical attractiveness and fashionable clothing.

The significance of these figure-ground techniques at work in rhetorical form of *Revolve* cannot be overstated. Consider two pages from *Revolve* that display portions of the book of Ephesians (pp. 277, 282). Scanning over these two pages, girls encounter ten different colored and visual elements that are printed on top of or over the underlying biblical passages. These include images and text blocks, as well as off-set quotations. For example, segments entitled “Radical Faith” and “Promises” (277) editorially interpret the biblical text for the girls, in addition to providing images that distract from the actual biblical passage. Rather than

encouraging girls to read and regard the biblical text first, and consider the editorial interpretations second, the way the page is structured attracts the reader's attention first to the colorful blocks of text before reading the small-print Bible verses between them. Similar issues arise from the "Blab" question-and-answers column (282), and a "Bible Basics" segment that takes up a full third of the page. A clock figure underlining the remaining biblical text completes the reader's distraction.



Ephesians 2:4-6

A prince is tragically separated from his parents at birth. For years they search for him, sending out soldiers to every region to look for the one who belongs to them. Finally, the boy is found, living in poverty, robbing for food, and acting like a savage. A soldier tells the boy about his father. His father is king of the entire country. In an instant, the beggar child has a new position. He is the son of a king. The one who thought he had no family has become royalty. He has a new life, new power, and a new home. He even has a place to sit beside his father's throne. You too are the child of a King. God has been merciful. He knew that you were dead in your sins, ruled by selfish desires, and destined for eternal punishment. He loved you and graciously gave you new life. With your new life has come new power and a new home with Christ in heaven.

1 From Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus. I am an apostle because that is what God wanted.

To God's holy people living in Ephesus, believers in Christ Jesus:

²Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

"IN CHRIST WE WERE CHOSEN TO BE GOD'S PEOPLE, BECAUSE FROM THE VERY BEGINNING GOD HAD DECIDED THIS IN KEEPING WITH HIS PLAN."

SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS IN CHRIST

³Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In Christ, God has given us every spiritual blessing in the heavenly world. ⁴That is, in Christ, he chose us before the world was made so that we would be his holy people—people without blame before him. ⁵Because of his love, God had already decided to make us his own children through Jesus Christ. That was what he wanted and what pleased him, ⁶and it brings praise to God because of his wonderful grace. God gave that grace to us freely, in Christ, the One he loves. ⁷In Christ we are set free by the blood of his death, and so we have forgiveness of sins. How rich is God's grace, ⁸which he has given to us so fully and freely. God, with full wisdom and understanding, ⁹let us know his secret purpose. This was what God wanted, and he planned to do it through Christ. ¹⁰His goal was to carry out his plan, when the right time came, that all things in heaven and on earth would be joined together in Christ as the head.

¹¹In Christ we were chosen to be God's people, because from the very beginning God had decided this in keeping with his plan. And he is



Ephesians 2:10

Most days just seem to go by like every other day. Same old stuff. Same old everything. Blah blah blah. One day runs into another one. You close your eyes and wake up to do it all over again. Doesn't seem like much of a plan, does it?

Maybe not. But God has an exciting plan for your life—a plan that will give you purpose and fulfillment beyond your wildest dreams. Following God's plan takes commitment from you. You don't just accidentally fulfill what he's planned for you to do. You've got to seek God and ask him to reveal his plan to you and to give you understanding about how you can fulfill it. Then, you've got to determine to make every day count for him and for his plan.

Pay attention to every decision you face—even the ones that seem so insignificant. Take seriously every person you meet—even the ones you don't like. Embrace every situation you find yourself in—even the ones that seem to make no sense at all. They're shaping you, molding you, preparing you for the next decision, the next person, the next situation.

Lose yourself in doing what God wants with every aspect of your life. Live your life in light of his plan!

"FOLLOWING GOD'S PLAN TAKES COMMITMENT FROM YOU."

Figure 2 Ephesians, Chapter 1 (277). Reprinted with permission. *Revolve: The Complete New Testament*, Ed. Kate Etue, 2003, Thomas Nelson, Inc. Nashville, TN. All rights reserved. Photographs altered from original text.

Blab

Q. My brother says he has a guardian angel watching over him. Is that weird, like some kind of imaginary friend or something?

A. If he starts talking to him and introducing him at parties, it might be a little weird. But Psalms says angels protect us, so he could be right. Nothing freaky here. Check out Psalm 91:11-12.

Q. My parents aren't Christians and they think that my faith is stupid. They smoke pot a lot and want me to smoke with them. I know I am supposed to honor my parents, but I'm also not supposed to break the law. What do I do?

A. No, you actually don't honor your parents by breaking God's law. God comes first, then your parents. So whatever they tell you to do that is against him, you don't do.

Q. I got really mad at my sister yesterday. Does that mean I'm not a Christian?

A. No. It means you are human. Remember that all of us are fallen and won't be perfect 'til we reach heaven.

bible basics



Prayer is just talking with God. You can tell him about anything that's going on in your life, your world. You can tell him how great he is, or chat with him about the pain in the neck your sister's being or the sadness you feel for a friend. Anything. He loves for us to talk with him and listen to him, so do it as much as you can.

will bring God's anger on those who do not obey him. ⁷So have nothing to do with them.

⁸In the past you were full of darkness, but now you are full of light in the Lord. So live like children who belong to the light. ⁹Light brings every kind of goodness, right living, and truth.

¹⁰Try to learn what pleases the Lord. ¹¹Have nothing to do with the things done in darkness, which are not worth anything. But show that they are wrong. ¹²It is shameful even to talk about what those people do in secret. ¹³But the light makes all things easy to see, ¹⁴and everything that is made easy to see can become light. This is why it is said:

"Wake up, sleeper!

Rise from death,

and Christ will shine on you."

¹⁵So be very careful how you live. Do not live like those who are not wise, but live wisely. ¹⁶Use every chance you have for doing good, because these are evil times. ¹⁷So do not be foolish but learn what the Lord wants you to do. ¹⁸Do not be drunk with wine, which

will ruin you, but be filled with the Spirit. ¹⁹Speak to each other with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making music in your hearts to the Lord. ²⁰Always give thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

WIVES AND HUSBANDS

²¹Yield to obey each other because you respect Christ.

²²Wives, yield to your husbands, as you do to the Lord, ²³because the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the church. And he is the Savior of the body, which is the church. ²⁴As the church yields to Christ, so you wives should yield to your husbands in everything.

²⁵Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it ²⁶to make it belong to God. Christ used the word to make the church clean by washing it with water. ²⁷He died so that he could give the church to himself like a bride in all her beauty. He died so that the church could be pure and

Figure 3 Ephesians, Chapter 5 (282) Reprinted with permission. *Revolve: The Complete New Testament*, Ed. Kate Etue, 2003, Thomas Nelson, Inc. Nashville, TN. All rights reserved.

All of these features upstage and overwhelm the scriptural text, with the result that these sidebars become figural in the reading of *Revolve*, with the New Testament taking a lesser position as the ground. Once the biblical text has been so diminished, it is likely that many of the magazine's readers will overlook it entirely.

Continuing its imitation of a fashion magazine, there are seventy-five "Didya Know" statistics that are interspersed throughout *Revolve*'s text. The statistics presented in these segments are not attributed to any source, reputable or not, nor are they related in any way to the biblical passages that surround them. A sample of these statistics includes:

"61% of young adults say they are financially comfortable" (58),
Nearly one million teen girls get pregnant every year" (127), and
"92% of teens say they are happy" (208).

None of the quoted statistics relate to the biblical text over which they are superimposed – suggesting that they are included in *Revolve* for reasons other than furthering an understanding of the New Testament passages. As well, no source is provided for any of the statistics featured in *Revolve*; it is possible they have simply been invented to reinforce the values and attitudes of the editors and publisher of *Revolve*. A further discussion of the ethical implications of these selected statistics is found in Chapter Three.

In addition to the statistics, there are also fourteen different quizzes for girls to complete, whose topics range from "Are you a gossip?" (345) to "Are you crushing too hard?" (222). Again, each of these imitation magazine elements is purported to engage girls with the biblical text; however, the text they actually engage is not the New Testament, but rather the opinions and viewpoints of the editorial staff of *Revolve*. The inclusion of these quizzes of course has an effect on how the biblical text itself is perceived by its reader. Treating such trivialities as "crushing" with high seriousness does not elevate them in the eyes of the reader; instead, the effect of such juxtaposition is an overall trivializing of the New Testament.

In *Permanence and Change: An Anatomy of Purpose*, Kenneth Burke emphasized the extent to which "a way of seeing is a way of not seeing – a focus upon object A involves a neglect of object B" (70). *Revolve* pretends to popularize the New Testament and make it more accessible to the public by appropriating modern media formats. However, its real purpose is revealed in the large gap between what its editors profess and what its format actually reveals. The extra features of the BibleZine culminate into a message that runs contrary to the original

text. This trivializing of the sacred in order to make a product more attractive to its audience is not about making a text more culturally relevant and accessible; instead, it moves into the arena of audience pandering and manipulation – reminiscent of Wayne Booth’s “advertiser’s stance.”³

Rather than raising their audience of young girls to the level of the Bible and its message, the publisher and editors have instead exploited sacred teachings of the text to make a profit. Editor Laurie Whaley states in an interview, "I think that the intent of [*Revolve*] is to show teen girls that, indeed, reading an issue of *Vogue*, reading the Bible can be just as simple as that, because it is in a format that is very similar and something they're very comfortable in reading" ("Bible Scripture Meets 21st Century Glitz"). This commercialization and "dumbing-down" of spiritual matters is evident everywhere in *Revolve*, from the superficial issues raised in its beauty secrets to its characterization of Bible verses as "love notes from God."

Other examples of the trivializing of spirituality in *Revolve* can be found in analyzing more of the design features that the editors claim are intended to inspire girls to engage with the biblical text; again, these features are characterized in the product description as operating as “spiritual twists” or “further-study notes.” Among the nearly twenty such recurring features are twelve monthly prayer and activity calendars, which are scattered throughout the magazine. Many of the activities in *Revolve*’s calendars are similar in content to the calendars included in typical teen magazines, except many times the BibleZine readers are prompted to pray for a “Person of Influence” on certain days:

February 21 – Pray for a Person of Influence: Jennifer Love Hewitt turns another year older today. (41)

July 12 – Pray for a Person of Influence: Adrienne Liesching’s (from The Benjamin Gate) birthday! (191)

³Wayne C. Booth, “The Rhetorical Stance.” *College Composition and Communication*. 14 (October 1963): 139-45. My analysis of *Revolve* reveals the second of Booth’s rhetorical corruptions: an overemphasis on audience accommodation or what he labels the “advertiser’s stance.” This corruption “comes from *undervaluing* the subject and *overvaluing* pure effect” (143). The advertiser is dangerous because of the long-term effects pandering can have upon an audience and the quality of the message itself. In the case of *Revolve*, pandering is definitely at work in its formatting as a BibleZine; this blending of the two genres is primarily a marketing strategy used to pander to its target audience’s conventional expectations and desires. The editors of *Revolve* choose to use perverted rhetorical appeals in order to gain followers to their consumer-driven version of Christianity.

October 17 – Pray for a Person of Influence: Eminem celebrates his b-day today!
(292)

Here the superficiality of celebrity culture found in typical magazines is imported directly into *Revolve* by the editorial choice of who qualifies as a “person of influence,” worthy enough to be mentioned within the pages of their New Testament. These “people of influence” are not ones we might expect to find in a religious text; instead, they are almost exclusively mainstream music or film stars – with the exception of several contemporary Christian music celebrities, whose mention in the calendars also serve as an advertising plug for their respective musical albums.



Figure 4 August Prayer Calendar (224) Reprinted with permission. *Revolve: The Complete New Testament*, Ed. Kate Etue, 2003, Thomas Nelson, Inc. Nashville, TN. All rights reserved.

The fact that magazine values of trendiness and disposability have trumped the more permanent values of a Bible is confirmed in the publisher's declared intention to "remain current" by releasing new versions of *Revolve* every twelve to eighteen months with updated versions of the calendars and other features of the magazine (Bauer). The idea that a Bible must "remain current" in its pop culture references is not questioned. Clearly, one function of such features is to provide a pretext for marketing future versions of the BibleZine.⁴

Another way the biblical text is diluted is through the twenty-two different "beauty secrets," as promised in the cover headline: "Beauty Secrets You've Never Heard Before!" This feature mimics its secular analogue in both form and content; each beauty secret includes a picture of a beaming girl along with such sage advice as "[s]piritual cleaning is like facial cleaning. The fire of God's love burns out the sin the same way the hot steam routs the dirt out of your pores" (120) to "[m]ake sure Jesus would be pleased with what you wear. You don't have to look frumpy, just make sure you look like a child of God"(167). The editors claim that these are examples of communicating a spiritual message to readers in language they would understand; in reality, the likening of God to the process of pore cleansing has a trivializing effect on the spiritual values *Revolve* supposedly purports.

⁴In addition to the expanded product line of *Revolve* books and CDs, there is now a "Revolve Tour" traveling around various locations in the United States. These weekend conferences provide opportunities for teenage girls to listen to various Christian speakers and musical acts. For more information on the current "Revolve Tour," visit its website: <<http://www.revolvetour.com/tour/>>. Accessed July 14, 2008.



Figure 5 “Beauty Secret” (155). Reprinted with permission. *Revolve: The Complete New Testament*, Ed. Kate Etue, 2003, Thomas Nelson, Inc. Nashville, TN. All rights reserved. Photographs altered from original text.



Figure 6 “Beauty Secret” (286) Reprinted with permission. *Revolve: The Complete New Testament*, Ed. Kate Etue, 2003, Thomas Nelson, Inc. Nashville, TN. All rights reserved. Photographs altered from original text.

The editors of *Revolve* know that their readers will appreciate (and recognize) the reference to beauty care, so they have presented a “beauty secret” as if it is a piece of spiritual

advice. The result is almost laughable, except that the statement is presented with an apparent disregard of its implications on the audience's view of spirituality. Readers are encouraged to associate pore-cleansing with a relationship with God; it is this merging of the mundane with the spiritual that is a consistent quality of *Revolve*. In addition, the vague admonition to "just make sure you look like a child of God" does not help readers to know what choices to make when selecting appropriate outfits, but only offers a vague cliché as a supposedly spiritual guideline.

Another example of *Revolve*'s trivializing the spiritual is found in one of the "Learn It & Live It" features:

2 Corinthians 2:15:

Learn It: We are the fragrance of Christ.

Live It: Put on some deodorant. I'm not talking about Secret; I'm talking about the Spirit of God. Spend twenty-five minutes tomorrow morning before school praying and reading scripture. Make it a priority, and smell good for goodness' sake!

Here the editors have literally made the connection between the metaphorical "fragrance" of 2 Corinthians to the wearing of everyday deodorant: "smell good for goodness' sake!" The likening of such disparate elements seriously diminishes the force of the biblical text, and invites readers to devalue what is actually being said in the biblical passage. *Revolve*'s reliance on a magazine's form encourages readers to experience the New Testament as shallow, trendy, and disposable – in short, as just one more fashion magazine.

In addition to trivializing the text, the extra features of *Revolve* are constructed in such a way that they, rather than the actual biblical text surrounding them, become the focus of audience attention. It is this emphasis on the stylistic features of *Revolve* that will have lasting effects beyond its publication. Within these features are implicit and sometimes explicit encouragements for girls to shape their behavior in a particular way. These behavioral cues are smuggled into the text by the editors in their choices of what to include and what not to include as features. From the selectively chosen "Didya Know" statistics of mysterious origin to the advice given in the question-and-answer "Blab" columns, a worldview is created and maintained throughout *Revolve*, and the editors choose to use the resources of a modern media form in order to support both a profit motive and a socially conservative perspective. The audience is carefully constructed through the shaping power of this text to behave and believe in specific ways, which

are then assisted and reinforced by the careful selection of information and perspectives represented within *Revolve*'s pages.

The editors and people behind *Revolve* claim that their intentions are to have girls engage with the biblical text by making it more approachable and culturally appropriate, an ostensibly hermeneutic purpose. However, the intentions the editors explicitly state are different from what is revealed by an analysis of the product they have produced. Most telling is that the editors and publisher view *Revolve*'s success as being measured not in terms of the number of girls who have been positively influenced by its publication, but rather it is calculated in terms of the amount of sales and money raised for Thomas Nelson, Inc.

The editors of *Revolve* borrow the authority of the Bible as a means to further communicate their own agenda: an agenda that is commercial and profit-driven rather than scriptural. Their long term-goal, after all, is to secure a future market "segment." Along the way, they undertake to establish a set of assumptions about what constitutes "ideal" female behavior in addition to their own interpretations of crucial biblical passages. By borrowing the authority of the Bible, the editors of *Revolve* exalt their product into the same league as scripture – a dangerous, if profitable, leap.

Therefore, parents who purchase *Revolve* for their daughters in the hope of directing their attention to the text of the Bible will more likely find themselves the victims of a slick marketing strategy that has engaged parental approval as but another means of selling what turns out to be simply one more teen fashion magazine. Parental sanction has thus been reduced to a sales technique. As this chapter has illustrated, the message is indeed influenced by its medium, and the editors' actions in formatting the BibleZine are indicative of their actual motivations.

These base motivations are the most apparent in the editorial choice to include several advertisements within the pages of this Bible. This deliberate inclusion of advertising exposes the conflict of values that I have been exploring throughout this chapter; it is through these appeals to other products that the materialistic profit motive of *Revolve*'s editors and publisher is fully exposed. There are at least twenty-five different items advertised in *Revolve*; the front and back cover both include full-page color advertisements for recently published books by Transit,⁵ and within the Bible itself there are lists of "Top Ten Great Christian CDs" (159) and "Top Ten

⁵Transit Books is a subsidiary of Thomas Nelson, Inc.

Great Christian Books” (186). The majority of products advertised in *Revolve* are books or other products published by Thomas Nelson, Inc or one of its connected companies.

Furthering its consumeristic purposes, several of the musical artists specifically mentioned in *Revolve*’s monthly prayer calendars are affiliated with Transit and Thomas Nelson, Inc. through various book deals and other contracts. A few examples of these include the mention of Rebecca St. James (191), Kevin Max (224), and Danielle Kimmey of Out of Eden (292), in addition to the mention of several others.⁶ In addition, two of the “Top Ten Great Christian Books” recommended to girls were written by one of *Revolve*’s editors. Besides the obvious conflict of interest, including advertising within the pages of a Bible goes directly against the New Testament’s explicit teachings of not combining the sacred with the profane. Yet, if a “Bible” can offer fashion and beauty advice, why not turn it into an advertising vehicle as well?

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, since the initial success of *Revolve*, Thomas Nelson, Inc. has made the BibleZine a part of the established Christian publishing industry. They have expanded their BibleZine audience beyond the young women of *Revolve*, and have crossed over into various children and adult versions – including: *Magnify*, a childrens’ BibleZine that includes comics and a secret decoder and *Redefine*, a BibleZine geared specifically to the Baby Boomer generation.⁷

Ultimately, I believe *Revolve* is selling to its audience something more than, or perhaps something other than, an updated version of the New Testament. This artifact has been carefully crafted to draw attention away from the Bible and to focus it more on the repeated features that appear alongside the biblical text. The primary message of this discourse is one of consumption rather than spirituality; the editors work carefully to construct and instill a vision of their own design within the readers of this Bible-magazine. *Revolve* borrows the rhetorical form associated with a teenage fashion magazine in order to express a message of materialism that is thinly, and

⁶For additional information on these associations, refer to Transit’s Summer 2003 catalog: <http://www.thomasnelson.com/consumer/Downloads/Catalogs/2003Summer/2003S_Transit.pdf>. Accessed May 22, 2008.

⁷For a list of Thomas Nelson’s full line of BibleZines, visit the publisher’s website: <http://www.thomasnelson.com/Consumer/dept.asp?dept_id=190900&TopLevel_id=190000>. Accessed July 10, 2008.

inadequately, disguised as religion. The context in which *Revolve* is presented in makes it impossible to take the New Testament seriously. The excessive catering to its target audience trivializes the content of the text, and its implicit invitation to become a "*Revolve* girl" makes this discourse rhetorically unbalanced. *Revolve* imbues itself with the authority only a holy book can bring, but rather than rendering the religious text "relevant" to teenagers today, its format instead promotes a worldview of materialism rather than one of spirituality.

CHAPTER TWO: The One-Way Friendships of *Revolve*: The Role of Footing and Faux Relation Building

While rhetorical presence and form influence the way *Revolve* is received by its audience, there is more at work than just the rhetoric of the BibleZine's visual content. This chapter marks a shift in my analysis of *Revolve*. The last chapter dealt with how the content, layout, and organization of the Bible-turned-magazine shapes the way the biblical text is approached by its readers. This chapter, however, will show how an intimate relationship is forged between the editors and their audience through the voice of one of *Revolve*'s features, the recurring "Blab" question-and-answer column. To do this, I will analyze the relational stance taken by the editors in the "Blab" feature, which, I argue, positions them to influence areas of their young audience's social, spiritual, and personal lives.

By including an advice column as a prominent feature of *Revolve*, the editors link themselves to a longstanding literary tradition. Advice-giving is a genre that dates back hundreds of years – examples range from the second-century book of *Meditations* by Marcus Aurelius, to the eighteenth-century maxims of Benjamin Franklin in *Poor Richard's Almanac*, to the modern-day advice giving found in such books as *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen Covey. Of course, one need only to open a newspaper today to find various types of advice columns, ranging from "Dear Abby" letters to Ann Landers dishing out advice to an eager audience. In fact, in the year 2000, an estimated \$600 million dollars, or six percent of the book industry, was spent on various self-help or advice books in North America (Gunnell 10). These books so dominate the best-seller lists that the *New York Times* has had to designate two separate categories for either hardcover or paperback advice books ("New York Times Best Seller Lists"). Critic George Dillon argues that the prevalence of advice books in our culture today makes them "as much a staple of the American diet as big-budget movies and bleached flour" (4).

The Blab segment is, by far, the feature that appears most frequently in *Revolve*. A headline on the cover promises its reader "200+ Blab Q & A's"¹ and these bright purple columns

¹ A count of the questions in the magazine yields only 176 questions and answers.

appear only pages apart throughout the BibleZine. Due to the draw of the column's visual presence, young teens will look to the voice of *Revolve*'s editors for answers before considering any of the actual biblical content. The voice of authority is transferred from the direct words of scripture to the inserted words of advice from the BibleZine's editors. In fact, it is these recurring interactions between the supposed "advisor" and *Revolve*'s audience that helps to forge a relationship that is reinforced by the rest of the BibleZine.

The problems addressed in the Blab segments primarily deal with contemporary issues ranging from questions about cloning (196, 248) to eating disorders (85, 219) to the proper amount of makeup a "tweener" should be allowed to wear (63). Of course, there are also several questions dealing with personal relationships: covering friendship difficulties, interactions with the opposite sex, and conflict in relationships. Oddly enough, there is no evidence in the Blab columns of real-life girls submitting questions, which invites the question – who, exactly, are asking these questions? Since this is the first edition of *Revolve*, they could not have come from readers, so where did they originate? It seems likely that these questions are the inventions of the editors of the BibleZine, whose intention is to use these advice-seeking moments as devices to further their own moralistic agendas of how girls should behave. By establishing a mock-friendship with the reader, the Blab advice columns are able to subtly work the ideology of the editors into the reader's consciousness.

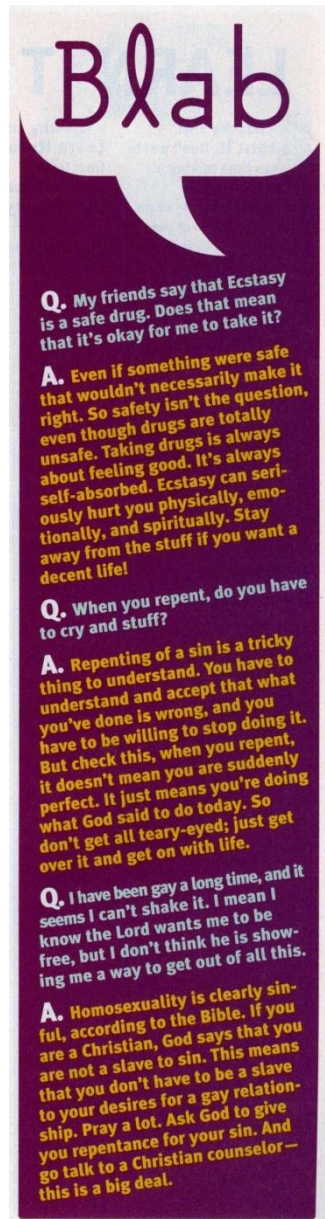


Figure 7 “Blab” column (255). Reprinted with permission. *Revolve: The Complete New Testament*, Ed. Kate Etue, 2003, Thomas Nelson, Inc. Nashville, TN. All rights reserved.

In his examination of the interpersonal dynamics of popular advice books, critic George Dillon explores how such works use identifiable patterns to establish, or explore, the relationship between an advice-giver and an advice-seeker. According to Dillon, this interpersonal dynamic is present even when the exchange takes place through the acts of writing and reading, rather than face to face. In fact, he argues, advice books are ideal for analyzing the nuances present in all relational communication. In order for advice books to be successful, according to Dillon, a

relationship of trust must be formed between the person dispensing the advice and the one receiving it. Connecting appropriately with the audience is crucial in these writing situations, as “advice writing occupies a sort of middle ground between ‘real’ writing and face-to-face conversation” (Dillon 5). Without the necessary bond of trust, readers may not consider or implement the advice being offered them. The Blab feature, with its explicit advice-giving format, offers *Revolve*’s editors the opportunity to position the “voice” of the magazine as a trusted guide whose counsel the readers seek. Because of the prominence of the Blab features, the voice of the column’s advisor then replaces any insight to be sought from the biblical text.

The relational dynamic between advisor and teenaged reader is one that was contrived from the start, because ultimately the editors of *Revolve* seek to shape their audience’s attitudes and preferences. Initially, the editors draw their status and authority from an implied biblical sanction, but they also work to construct the magazine’s voice as that of an intimate confidant, a trusted relationship who encourages the girls to accept (and implement) not only the immediate advice of the column, but the ideology that goes with it.² According to Dillon, there are particular conventions to the acts of giving and receiving advice, yet the roles of the reader and writer are not completely fixed in their relationship. Rather, these roles are built through the dynamic of writing and reading. In this chapter I propose to examine how the Blab feature functions as part of an “orchestrated strategy” intended to establish a relationship of a particular sort between the editors and audience of readers (Dillon 7).

The relational aspect of communication is critical to understanding the effectiveness of a text, particularly one that seeks to offer intimate counsel. The connection of content and relation in communication is not an unlikely pairing, as Jennifer MacLennan shows in her formulation of Nine Axioms that are present in any communicative situation. The Nine Axioms find their

²While the manufactured audience/editorial relationship in the Blab columns of *Revolve* is not one that is explicitly acknowledged by its editors or publisher, there has been a recent addition to Thomas Nelson’s family of BibleZines that does market itself as such an advisory voice to its audience of young readers. The BibleZine’s name is *Blossom*, and in its product description, it is billed as “a big sister or older friend” who can “explain some of these [growing up] changes to you.” No longer is simply the magazine format enough, as *Blossom*’s sidebars now brag to be “filled with the great advice of a big sister.” For more information on the *Blossom* BibleZine, visit the product description on the publisher’s website: <http://www.thomasnelson.com/Consumer/product_detail.asp?dept_id=190900&sku=0718015266&TopLevel_id=190000>. Accessed July 16, 2008.

foundation in Aristotle's modes of appeal and demonstrate some of the intricacies of communicating. These principles clarify the relational aspects of communication, and demonstrate it is more than simply an information exchange between individuals; it also inescapably involves "the relationships that are formed when we communicate" (MacLennan 8).

All advice-giving relies on relation, and this relation is built (and maintained) through language. In fact, the tone a communicator chooses to take in a discourse can reveal much about his or her attitude toward the audience. Dillon identifies two broad categories of a relational tone that can be employed in a discourse: hard or soft rhetoric. The tension present between content and relationship is where Dillon's distinctions between hard and soft rhetoric can most clearly be seen. These two styles of rhetoric influence the level of relation between the reader and writer.

George Dillon defines hard rhetoric as a linguistic style that privileges directness and focuses more on task than feelings. It is a direct approach that tends to issue orders, and is typically characterized by features of "competition, contention, and combat" (Dillon 43). Hard rhetoric prioritizes communicating the content of a message over establishing a cozy relationship with the audience. Instead, the relationship established is more typically one of a superior providing guidance, or even orders, to a subordinate. The tone of hard rhetoric is matter-of-fact and directive in nature.

On the other hand, soft rhetoric avoids displaying any overt verbal aggressiveness to the reader, instead exhibiting a concern "for the reader's self-esteem by not criticizing or confronting him [but] offering him ways of thinking well of himself while taking [the offered] advice" (Dillon 66). Soft rhetoric privileges a positive audience relation and prefers conciliatory language over the imperatives issued by hard rhetoric. Its three characteristics are summarized as "cooperation, participation, and enactment of social bondedness" (Dillon 43). The relation created by a soft rhetorical approach is altogether different than one established by the harder version.

Ideally, communication should seek to appropriately match the approach (of hard or soft rhetoric) to the demands of the context. In theory, the two modes of communicating are quite distinct, but this is true only in extreme cases. Actual practice is more subtle, and in a single discourse, hard and soft rhetoric can appear in varying degrees – even, at times, in concert. There are also cases in which a directive hard rhetoric can be disguised by the softening effects of linguistic features normally associated with soft rhetoric.

The linguistic choices in an advice text can have lasting implications, committing “writers to positions on scales of status, power, and authority” and inviting readers to assume complementary positions (Dillon 7). In short, the advice text cannot help inviting certain “social realities” that are important to an advisor/advisee relationship (Dillon 7). The language of advice texts and the resulting relationship that is forged between the writer and reader are a part of this “social reality” that merits examination, particularly in the case of *Revolve*, which uses both hard and soft rhetoric to convey its message.

To further aid the critic in discerning and classifying the elements of hard and soft rhetoric as they are used in practice, Dillon offers an analytical model designed to plot what he terms “footing.” Footing unmask the relational dynamic created by the positioning of advisor and advisee within the discourse’s language. Footing can be plotted as points along five sets of *continua*, each representing different levels of identification between the speaker and audience. This relationship might therefore be described as

- impersonal or personal;
- distant or solidary;
- superior or equal;
- confrontive or oblique;
- formal or informal.

Once established, footing does not remain static throughout a text; rather, like any relationship, it may evolve in any of these “five complexly related dimensions,” which Dillon offers as “somewhat metaphorical vectors of approach and distance or aggression and ingratiation” for the critic to consider in analysis of the discourse (Dillon 17).

In order to plot the dynamics of footing in *Revolve*’s Blab feature, I will distinguish between the “softer” elements of footing that promote stronger, more intimate identification and the “harder” elements that downplay the interpersonal. A soft rhetorical footing would be expected to feature more personal, solidary, equal, oblique and informal qualities, while hard rhetoric tends toward the impersonal, distant, superior, confrontive and formal footing positions. The content and tone of most of the Blab column suggests a soft footing – yet there is, nevertheless, evidence of a hard rhetorical approach in some of the heavily disguised relational appeals of the responses.

Revolve combines these two approaches of hard and soft rhetoric, transforming the voice of the column into “someone who wants to be your friend, rather than someone who is” (Dillon 66). Naive young readers will want to embrace the colloquial, friendly tone found in the recurring columns, yet will not recognize the editors’ purpose behind the advice giving; the voice of the Blab advisor is not seeking the audience’s devotion in terms of a friendship, but rather seeks a commitment to future purchases of the BibleZine product line. Thus, for their message to be successful, the editors need to demonstrate their credibility (and mock friendship) so that readers will accept their advice. They do this by establishing a kind of mock friendship between the advice-giving voice of the Blab columns and the reader. It is this “friendly disposition” that projects the “belief that [the writer’s] recommended course of action *is* advantageous to the audience (because she is the sort of person who does have their best interests at heart)” (Dillon 45). Any aggressiveness in the Blab answers is often masked through overtly positive techniques to convince the girls that the advisor is sympathetic and understanding to their plight. It is the facets of this dishonest “relationship” between the voice of the advisor and the young readers of *Revolve* that will be the focus of my examination.

For the remainder of this chapter, I will examine several examples from the Blab column to illustrate the intertwining of hard and soft rhetoric and to demonstrate the different footings employed in the question and answer column. In these examples, Dillon’s analytical framework will provide “a more adequate vocabulary” to “describ[e] the [f]ootings that writers set up” and to show how “choices along these dimensions combine and interact” in *Revolve* (Dillon 33).

The first example is in reference to a reader’s relationship with God:

- Q. Ever feel like God is pulling away from you? What did you do to get better?
- A. Many people have felt like God was pulling away from them, you aren’t alone, but the thing is that God doesn’t pull away from us. He is always there, but sometimes he is there in different ways. Faith isn’t a feeling, and the way we feel about God shouldn’t change what we believe about him. It may take days, it may take months, but your job is to wait and never stop believing. (136)

On the surface, the informal tone of the above exchange is deceptive – it appears to be using a personal footing by its reference to the reader as “you.” It also appears to be personal in the

implicit invitation of the reader to confide in the advisor. But the appearance of a personal footing is one-sided, as there is a lack of a corresponding authorial “I” to the reader’s “you.” Despite the reader’s direct plea to hear about what the advisor (“you”) did “to get better,” the impersonal reply avoids a reciprocal connection.

This disproportionate personal quality of footing is carried through the entire column, where out of nearly two hundred question and answer segments, there are only two instances where the advisor directly appeals to the reader as “I.”³ While it is typical to encounter first- and second-person pronouns in most types of advice writing, the use of “*you* without *I* is unusual, [and is] characteristic only of highly directive kinds of advice” (Dillon 21). The directive nature that underscores the “Blab” column is one of the elements that make it an example of hard rhetoric. But rarely are there examples of only one type of rhetoric (hard or soft) at work in the question and answers of *Revolve*. One of the reasons the column is effective in echoing other types of advice columns is that it combines the appeals of both types of rhetoric. The above answer appears to begin with a softer approach: it uses an oblique footing by its reference to “many people” who have also experienced similar doubts to the reader’s. This strategy initially puts the focus off the reader, and onto an unnamed “them.”

While this footing seemingly assures the reader that she is “not alone” in her doubts, the soft approach soon transforms into a more confrontive (and superior) stance, as the writer’s tone shifts to issue several directives that combat the reader’s doubt, a few of which include: “God doesn’t pull away from us,” “[God] is always there,” “Faith isn’t a feeling,” “[feelings about God] shouldn’t change,” etc. The use of this confrontive stance also indicates that the “many people” who may have experienced spiritual insecurity do not include the confident advisor who is replying to the question. While the reader’s question involves issues of doubt, the editorial answer is full of indisputable assurance – which is strengthened by the presence of several hortatory negatives in the reply: “aren’t,” “doesn’t,” “isn’t,” and “shouldn’t.”

This tone of certainty positions the advisor at a level above the mere doubts of the reader and implies the girl is both naive and guilty for daring to ask such a silly question. The relationship of a superior to an inferior is reinforced in this type of exchange, yet because the reply is masked in an informal manner (strategically using lax diction, contractions and personal

³Both of these examples appear on page 366 of the BibleZine.

appeals to the reader), the hard rhetoric implicit in the answer may go unnoticed by the audience. A strictly soft rhetorical approach would more likely have reassured the reader that these doubts and insecurities are a normal part of the faith experience.

A softer rhetorical approach can be noted in the following example:

Q. I really want to be closer to the Lord! I know I have to read the Bible and everything and pray, but I also want something more! I want to feel him reach down on me! And talk to me!

A. What you're looking for is an emotional relationship with God. Sometimes we feel him really intensely. It's like he's right there with us, touching us like you said. But sometimes, we don't feel him. It's like we don't even know he's there. What you need to do is stay immersed in the Scripture and keep praying your heart out. Eventually, you will be at a point where you can feel him again. But 'til then, understand that those desert times where you can't feel him doesn't mean you aren't close to him. He's just taking you on a different path for a while. (196)

Here the writer mimics the “shared values, terminology, and point of view” of the readers by reflecting their word choice and tone (Dillon 23). The resulting answer is full of the first person plural, contracted words, and short syntax. The word “like” is used three times in the reply, echoing the colloquialisms of the supposed audience in order to “evoke a [familiar] voice speaking” back to the readers (Dillon 6). The cliché “Praying your heart out” is meant to “demystify” and “[inspire] a sort of guileless sincerity” within the answer, which also is meant to encourage a seemingly stronger solidary footing between the two roles (Dillon 25). When readers feel a sense of solidarity with the editors, they are then put into a place where they are more willing to accept the advice being offered to them. In fact, the entire answer is presented in an informal footing. The effect of these textual strategies is to reduce readers’ resistance to the message, because the advisor uses “language that compensates [readers] by pulling back or gratifying other wants” (Dillon 17).

Also worth noting in the first part of the editorial response is the sexualizing of God. The advisor writes that God is “right there with us, touching us” and that “we feel him really intensely.” This enthymematic leap of connecting God to the physical presence of a love interest

reveals the editors' implicit encouragement to the audience to regard God in an intimate (and perhaps inappropriate) way.

But, again, underlying these softening effects lays a more direct, hard rhetoric. The harsh connotative power behind hard rhetorical statements seemingly contrasts with the relational effects that softer rhetoric aims for. Note that there are several commands within the reply, including the assertive phrases "What you're looking for is. . ." and "What you need to do. . ." The issuing of orders is an approach that typically indicates a superior footing, a stance that is distinguished by non-negotiable claims to knowledge. Also behind the advice are the editors' attempts to dictate the readers' behavior and attitude about God. In a superior footing, readers are not invited to use their own judgement, as this footing is "marked by a tendency to spell out the implications of what is said, rather than leave them for the reader to draw" (Dillon 28).

In this particular answer, the readers are drawn into a subtle encoding of behavior, which is couched in the informal (while superior) footing of this answer. Rather than encouraging readers to recognize their doubt and work to find some type of personal resolution to it, girls are just told to keep "immersed in the Scripture and keep praying your heart out" until they "feel [God] again." The squashing of doubt is purposeful on the editors' part, as a means of guiding their audience's behavior in a certain direction.

The encoding of behavior continues in the following question and answer exchange:

- Q. If you accept Christ but later you turn from him, or start to go down the wrong road, does God stick with you til there is no chance of restoration?
- A. Scripture tells us that salvation has nothing to do with what we DO but with what we believe, that is, in Christ. But it also says that we should make him Lord of our lives. But if a person claims to be saved but then acts like they are an enemy of God, disobeying him purposefully, then they probably never really made him Lord of their life. (147)

Within the first sentence of the editor's reply lies a contradiction. The readers are told that "salvation has nothing to do with what we DO but with what we believe," a statement that goes against several other editorial answers given in the column where the readers are told that there are specific actions to be taken in order to secure a personal relationship with God. For instance, in the previous "Blab" example I examined from page 196, readers were explicitly told "what

you need to do is” and were then given a specific set of actions to follow in order to “feel” close to God again.

But beyond this contradiction, there are several other elements at work in the editorial reply. As the answer advances and crosses over into potentially threatening territory, the pronouns shift from first person (“we” and “our”) to third person (“they” and “their”). The writer appears to deflect blame away from the reader in order to discuss “a person” who “acts like they [sic] are an enemy of God.” This shift of pronouns indicates an oblique footing, which will often use third person “so as not to put the Reader on the spot” (Dillon 30). The shift is significant, because it directs its admonishment onto an imaginary, distant third person who is not present in the dialogue. Typically in an oblique footing, the readers actively absorb the shifted focus and do not feel personally attacked – a strategy that enables them to join the advisor in scolding the unnamed individual, without having to feel any personal repercussions.

While this deflection initially appears to be the work of a soft approach, I believe there is also a hard rhetoric element underlying the positioning of the reply. The reprimand of the unnamed individual also could be perceived as a masked threat of what happens to the faith relationship when people stray from God. In the question, the reader is looking for reassurance from the editors that God is willing to maintain relation (“stick with you”) whenever she goes astray (or “down the wrong road”) – yet the reply reinforces a fear element to the spiritual relationship, which could also be perceived as a veiled threat. The answer subtly implicates the reader along with the unnamed person, calling to mind the times the reader may have disobeyed God. All of this acts as a warning that any disobedience is akin to acting as an enemy of God, with no room for doubt or question.

In combination with a relaxed diction, many of the replies are formatted in such a way that the theological concepts that are discussed are also simplified. Two examples of informal questions and answers show this aspect of footing:

- Q. Does God really know everything?
- A. Yep. He knows everything. (125)
- Q. I did something that I shouldn’t have and now I think I have lost a friend. I asked her to forgive me but she won’t talk to me. What do I do?
- A. Honestly, now your friend’s being the jerk. You did your job. You asked for forgiveness. You can’t force her to forgive you. Sorry. (219)

In the first example, a level of certainty is projected in its concise answer: “Yep. He knows everything.” In its brief and reductive reply, a theological question that people have been wrestling with for thousands of years is succinctly encapsulated in four words, one of which is a colloquialism. The effects of this curt answer are that any doubts the girls may be entertaining regarding the knowledge of God are summarily dismissed, without further discussion or elaboration. This short answer is significant as it illustrates the overall shallow and ephemeral nature of the BibleZine, especially in regards to its conception of spirituality. If complicated questions such as these can be answered in four words or less, the readers are led to understand that spiritual matters can be reduced to trivialities, and that there is no need for deeper introspection in matters of faith.

The second question-and-answer exchange contains a superior stance in that it disregards any possibility of complications in the interpersonal dynamics of the reader’s situation. The interworkings behind the scenario outlined in the question are left vague; the reader simply states that she “did something that I shouldn’t have” and that when she “asked [the friend] to forgive me ... she won’t talk to me.” The editorial reply glosses over the dynamics of a relationship gone awry, and abruptly summarizes the situation by placing the blame solely on the wronged (unforgiving) party, rather than examining the intricacies of why an apology may not be sufficient to mend a broken relationship. So what does an answer like this reinforce for the reader? “You did your job” is quite the superior assertion, considering the lack of knowledge on the advisor’s part regarding the sincerity of the apology and the details of the situation it is responding to.

Yet the most striking exchanges in the Blab feature are the ones that deal with relationships regarding the opposite sex. Staying true to the fashion magazine format, many of the questions in the Blab column center around dating relationships and boys in general. There are twenty-eight examples of these types of questions, with topics ranging from dating non-believers to the appropriate levels of physical intimacy in a relationship. The majority of the inquiries fall into three categories: questions about fantasizing, questions about the status of male/female roles in relationships, and questions regarding the nature of physical relationships. For the most part, the editorial replies in these exchanges are markedly more vehement than any other topic covered in the column. Many of the editorial replies privilege a masculine authority and unequivocal hierarchy found in relationships. These types of answers display a “categorical

vehemence in assertion,” and are “marked by a tendency to spell out the implications of what is said, rather than leave them for the reader to draw” (Dillon 28).

The responses to such questions are didactic and show a distinct pattern: they tend not to answer the specific questions girls ask, but rather treat the question as a springboard for asserting editorial perspectives on how girls should act or believe. For instance, in the following exchange, a reader asks a seemingly innocent question about the nature of fantasizing. In the answer, note how the editorial response covers ground that is completely different from the question initially posed:

- Q. Is fantasizing wrong? I sometimes imagine things about guys, not nasty things, but just wishing things would happen. Is that wrong?
- A. It is no less a sin to think or fantasize about it than it is to actually do it. As soon as a bad thought comes into your mind you have to stop it. Temptation is not a sin, but yielding to that temptation – turning it into a fantasy that you think about over and over – is a sin. (21)

The advice is positioned in a confrontive and superior manner, and there are several underlying assumptions embedded in the reply. Although the girl emphasizes that her thoughts are “not nasty things,” the advisor assumes the worst intentions of the girl by advising her not to yield over to the “temptation.” Thus the link between thinking about a boy and sexually obsessing about him is blurred. The reader’s vague statement about “wishing things would happen” is labeled a “sin” and the advisor automatically condemns the girl for entertaining any thoughts, no matter how innocent they might be, about the opposite sex. This tone of a superior footing is one of assertiveness: it uses adverbs of certainty, along with universal qualifiers and value judgements. The answer above is not meant to console the girl or to relieve her doubts, but to foster a sense of shame and urgency. The editorial assumption here is that the reader has already committed a “sin” by admitting to her natural reaction to the opposite sex. This exchange is one example of how the editors use the replies of the Blab column to condition their readers’ behavior (and thoughts) regarding boys. The overreaction found in this reply is prevalent throughout *Revolve*, particularly whenever questions arise concerning the opposite sex.

This conditioning of the audience continues in the following exchange:

- Q. Hey, my question is how do you tell a friend that’s your crush that you’re into him without ruining your friendship?

- A. You don't. Sorry. You just don't tell him without it ruining your friendship. God made guys to be the leaders. That means that they lead in relationships. *They tell you* they like you. It is just an all around bad idea for girls to take on a guy's responsibility. (189)

Again, the above question merely acts as a starting-point for the editors to issue correctives, implant a social hierarchy, and not really answer the reader's query. The reply is confrontive and impersonal – as it initially responds to the question, the tone is curt: “You don't. Sorry.” All soft rhetorical appeals are pushed aside and the hard rhetoric of the answer puts the readers in their place, in terms of a relational hierarchy. This type of confrontive stance is a footing of dominance – with its main concern one of getting the point across to the reader, despite any possible repercussions to the writer/reader relationship. Face attacks⁴ are typical with this footing, as the reader is frequently challenged and put directly on the spot. In the reply, the collective face of the audience is attacked, as the brusque answer casts them into a lower position than their male counterparts.

This sweeping judgement positions girls' relational responsibility as less active than boys, “*They tell you* they like you.” This type of assertion characterizes a superior footing in that “the Writer *knows*, and ... does not hesitate to say so” (Dillon 27-28). Gone are the subtle attempts to encode the readers' behavior: now the advisor asserts that “God made guys to be the leaders. That means they lead in relationships,” which leaves no room for girls to question a so-called divine order. This explicit statement is further evidence of hard rhetoric at work within the exchange. Readers are made to view themselves as subservient to their male counterparts, while being forced to acknowledge that it is part of a divine mandate to allow men to dictate the direction of their relationships. The editorial voice speaks as the voice of authority, and readers are not expected to use their own judgements, but are encouraged instead to rely on the wisdom that “It is just an all around bad idea for girls to take on a guy's responsibility.”

⁴Erving Goffman defines face as “the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact.” From the chapter “On Face-Work: An Analysis of Ritual Elements in Social Interaction” in *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face to Face Behavior*. New York: Anchor Books, 1967. 5. A face attack issues a challenge to the social image a person possesses; in the case of *Revolve's* readers, most of the face attacks can be found whenever girls openly challenge the (editorially-established) hierarchy found in relationships with the opposite sex.

Impersonal footings like these typically use an objective voice and project an authorial distance from the reader. Rather than scripting a performance for the reader to follow, as is done in a more personal footing, the impersonal stance detaches the writer from the reader by using various neutral or negative techniques in the writing. This detachment is shown in this exchange when the answer shifts from the second person address (“you”) to a more generalized group address (“girls”). The effect of this shift is not only to depersonalize the reader through an impersonal footing, but to also make the advice appear universal and applicable to all girls. The implications to following this type of advice are huge. Not only will girls position themselves as subordinate to boys in terms of their dating relationships, but the explicit admonitions of this advice will likely condition them in terms of how they view themselves.

A similar tone can be found in the following exchange:

- Q. Why do you think guys should call girls or whatever? I don’t understand that; you mean you think men should pursue women?
- A. Get a grip on the truth. Guys love a challenge. They love the chase. The game. When a girl starts asking a guy out, he likes it. It strokes his ego. But he will get bored! And when that happens . . . next! So guys need to step up and be the man; you need to be the woman. (339)

Right away, the answer opens with a face attack on the reader: “get a grip on the truth.” The short syntax of the reply is indicative of an informal footing, but the feigned ease of the answer belies its clearly confrontive and superior stance. Again, implications for the readers are unabashedly drawn – if they pursue boys, any relationship that is formed is doomed to failure because they have overstepped their predetermined bounds. Hard rhetorical approaches such as this one give the “appearance of candor” while “frankly acknowledg[ing] its desire for mastery” (Dillon 65, 44). The role of a girl is very clearly spelled out for the reader, in relation to where she fits on the gender scale of responsibility.

But what are the implications involved with the statement “guys need to step up and be the man; you need to be the woman?” The admonition here is not fully articulated, and is left open for the reader to convince herself, enthymematically. Assumptions like these are where the culminating effects of the earlier advice of the Blab column will come into play. Girls have been encouraged to view guys as divinely-established leaders, and have been admonished away from taking active roles in their relationships.

The frank tone of the advisor continues in the following dialogue:

- Q. If I have sex with my boyfriend and I'm not saved, will God forgive me when I get saved? I'm waiting to get saved so that I can have sex with my boyfriend.
- A. You obviously know that sex outside marriage is wrong or you wouldn't be asking about forgiveness. So let me ask you this, why are you having sex with this guy? Figure out why you are doing something that you know is wrong. You're worth far more than that in God's eyes. And whether you're saved or not, God's Word is still true. Sex outside of marriage is sinful. But remember, none of us are guaranteed another breath. You may not get the chance to be saved later. Don't procrastinate when it comes to your eternity. (226)

Note that the admonition has intensified from merely “get a grip on the truth” to consequences of an eternal proportion: “You may not get the chance to be saved later. Don't procrastinate when it comes to your eternity.” The hard rhetoric of this passage is clear, as it takes a confrontive and superior footing in its positioning of advice. The underlining tone of this exchange is one of fear; the advisor makes sure to advance the reader's concern not by answering the original question (“Will God forgive me?”), but by changing the subject to make a statement regarding the future condition of the reader's soul. This fear-mongering technique is part of a plan to scare not only the individual petitioner, but also intimidate the wider audience into accepting and following the vision *Revolve* sets forth.

The Bible has traditionally been viewed as a resource for insightful guidance in regards to individuals' questions; however, the appearance of this “Blab” advice column in the BibleZine has reduced the Bible into a source for superficial counsel. In fact, the editorial choice to name the feature “Blab” hints at the flippant nature of the dispensed advice. The range of topics within the question-and-answers – from seemingly insignificant matters such as clothing choice, to the fleeting treatment of more serious theological issues – reveals a type of spiritualized pandering to teens and reinforces the notion that reading a theological text can be as simple as encountering a copy of their favorite fashion magazine. The implications of the unbalanced rhetorical appeals found in the Blab column will be long-reaching for *Revolve*'s audience. Rather than encouraging teenaged girls to wrestle with the original biblical text in pursuit of

answers, the Blab column reduces biblical lessons to moralizing pettiness. In the next chapter, I will examine the culmination of appeals such as these, using an ethical critique of what these implications mean for the readers of *Revolve*.

CHAPTER THREE: The Making of a “*Revolve* Girl”: The Transformation of Teen Spiritual Identity

As my examination of *Revolve* draws to a close, my critique will now focus on the editorial efforts to construct a particular identity for their readers to embrace. Using Kenneth Burke’s theories of rhetorical identification and courtship, I will further examine the underlying ethical implications behind the editors’ choices when it comes to their structuring of *Revolve*. Ultimately I believe that this “new look” to the Bible masks a motivation to urge readers to aspire to greater heights of materialism, not spirituality.

Kenneth Burke in *A Rhetoric of Motives* adds an additional dimension to understanding rhetoric’s function: identification. His conception of identification was inspired in part by his pursuit to understand the nature, ends, and effects of language on an audience (Foss, Foss, and Trapp 169). Traditional definitions of rhetoric were primarily characterized by the “key term” of persuasion, yet according to Burke, this “classical notion of clear persuasive intent is not an accurate fit” to describe the many ways rhetorical communication functions (RM xiv). To resolve this issue, Burke adds the element of identification to rhetoric’s definition – not to replace its primary function of persuasion, but to offer a more complete view of how the discipline works. Burke clarifies this “rationale for going beyond explicit design” by emphasizing the role of identification in the “new rhetoric,” so that the unconscious appeals present in communication could be better analyzed (Heath 197). Whereas the “old” rhetoric put most of its stress on the “deliberate design” of an artifact, examining elements of identification “can include a partially ‘unconscious’ factor in [audience] appeal” (Burke “Rhetoric – Old and New” 203).

We have already seen a distinction between deliberate design and unconscious audience appeal in my examination of *Revolve*. In the first chapter, I clarified the difference between the appeal of an object’s format versus the rhetorical form it takes. In this case, format referred to the borrowed magazine arrangement of *Revolve*, while the appeals of form were found in how the BibleZine’s audience transferred their superficial expectations of a fashion magazine over to

the New Testament. This unconscious, enthymematic transfer of meaning reinforces the reason why artifacts like *Revolve* need to be examined beyond just the implications of their surface features. In fact, Burke agreed that there are additional ways of examining “explicit designs with regard to the confronting of an audience,” and that “there are also ways in which [an audience can] *spontaneously, intuitively, even unconsciously* persuade [themselves]” (LASA 301).

It is these unconscious appeals in *Revolve* that merit careful examination, and Burke’s theories on identification will help uncover more of the unethical persuasion that is taking place in the BibleZine. This particular type of analysis is necessary, because “through the manipulation of identifications (sometimes overt and sometimes covert) [a speaker can] persuade others to the attitude or action that one desires” (Rueckhart 22). So beyond the initial financial motivations of having teenagers buy their product, I want to examine the long-term effects *Revolve* will have on how its audience shapes their future identity, particularly when it comes to spirituality.

Identification is a crucial element of communication, as Burke perceived human beings to be living in a perpetual state of division. He writes: “If men were not apart from one another, there would be no need for the rhetorician to proclaim their unity. If men were wholly and truly of one substance, absolute communication would be of man’s very essence” (Burke RM 22). Nearly forty years after Burke first wrote about identification, Robert Heath reinforces the theory’s continued importance by stating, “identification is potent because estrangement is a recurring human relation problem” (208).

Burke describes division and identification as “ironic counterparts” (RM 23) – in other words, “one implies the other” (Wolin 200). While the process of identification could be said to alleviate separation, it is also inspired in part by the problems caused by it. Without the initial prompting of division, there would be no need to break down differences with each other to find commonalities. Burke deftly summarizes this process by stating, “identification is compensatory to division” (RM 22). Thus, the driving motive behind the use of rhetoric is to identify with others in order to be able to fully persuade, or as Burke put it, join “substances.” To become “consubstantial” with an audience, a speaker “must identify himself with them (show that he and they share the same oneness or unity) [and] he must persuade them [...] through his speeches or literary documents that his attitudes (which he wants them to accept) and their attitudes are ‘substantially’ the same, because both he and they have the same essence or substance” (L.

Holland 34-35). Therefore, in order to persuade an audience effectively, we must first find some way to identify with them. This “doctrine of *consubstantiality*,” according to Burke, “may be necessary to any way of life” (RM 21).

Since humankind is in this natural and continual state of estrangement, separation inspires not only communication, but also fuels the use of rhetoric to help join people together in common interests and goals. In this sense, “rhetoric occurs when individuals examine their identities to determine who they are and how they fit into groups with others who share those identities” (Heath 202). Yet before being able to “fit into” any shared group identity, the separation of the individual must be overcome – not only in a literal and biological sense, but also socially. The social separation, or estrangement, between humans is often referred to as “mystery” by Burke; he described mystery as the “*social* differentiations” that can make individuals appear “subtly mysterious to each other, not merely [as] two different people, but representing two different *classes* (or “kinds”) of people” (RM 115). This distinction sets up a different type of estrangement from each other, namely, one that consists of a social hierarchy.

The rhetorical process at work in the BibleZine is what Burke would refer to as a “rhetoric of courtship” (RM 115-18). Joseph Gusfield describes Burke’s theory of courtship as “the form through which social and economic classes ‘court’ each other in the process of addressing and interacting” (Gusfield 38). Courtship, in this case, does not refer solely to romantic actions, but as Burke put it: “by the ‘principle of courtship’ in rhetoric we mean the use of suasive devices for the transcending of social estrangement” caused by hierarchy (RM 208). The concept of hierarchy is one that is prevalent in Burke’s work. Michael Dixon breaks down the Burkean social hierarchy into three levels which include “those between sexes, those between social classes, and those between different orders of Being (Humanity, Nature, and God)” (10). These hierarchies not only highlight separation between individuals, but also engender a desire, or “hierarchic motive,” to transcend current levels toward some “ultimate” end (Burke RM 217). Burke explains:

The hierarchic principle of courtship sets a pattern of communication between “lower” and “higher” classes (or kinds). This can be universalized in terms of a climbing from body to soul, from senses through reason to understanding, from worldly to the angelic to God, from woman to beauty in general to transcendent desire for Absolute union. (RM 231-32)

Thus, the division we naturally feel as human beings is transcended, or overcome, through a process of courtship. Speakers employ various strategies of courtship in order to goad their audience to ascend the social hierarchy toward higher levels. Naturally, the audience desires to achieve these higher levels, because the “old [identifications] no longer satisfy our needs” (Heath 226).

Yet key to this ascension of hierarchy is a manipulation of the audience’s desires. It is all part of a chain reaction, described by Burke’s theory of courtship. By nature, humanity is divided from each other. This felt estrangement causes a desire in us to “transcend the social mystery,” and overcome differences by scaling hierarchies toward an ultimate goal (Burke RM 221). While mystery “requires identification as an anecdote” (Heath 203), the process of courtship also aids identification, in that it helps to overcome the “inherent divisiveness” of the human condition (Bertelsen 240). A speaker manipulates the sense of estrangement naturally found in an audience to encourage them to identify with whatever he or she terms as the “Ultimate.”

In the case of *Revolve*, the editors play upon various estrangements of their young audience: from the teens’ felt separation from their spirituality and God (partially due to their discomfort with reading traditional biblical passages) to typical adolescent estrangements found in changing identities and raging hormones. The editors then manipulate these estrangements and encourage their young readers to ascend the *Revolve* hierarchy, as established by the editorial staff. What results is a complicated process where several of the young audience’s desires are manipulated, a few of which include: the desires of beauty and glamour traditionally found in fashion magazines, the adolescent desires of romantic relationships, and the religious desire to have a better relationship with God.

Burke’s two conceptions of identification and courtship will help to add another layer of awareness in examining what is happening within the pages of *Revolve*. These theories will uncover even more implications, both textual and ethical, of what happens to a religion when the ethics and assumptions of the fashion world are forcefully incorporated with those of the spiritual, revealing “how a rhetorical motive is often present where it is not usually recognized, or thought to belong” (Burke RM xiii). Since identification looks at how a text influences readers to overcome their feelings of estrangement, I want to consider what values are being transmitted to *Revolve*’s audience. I believe the superficial methods used by *Revolve*’s editors

can be interpreted as being unethical in the worldview they represent. In earlier chapters, I treated the extra features of *Revolve* and the biblical text as separate entities to critique. Yet for the analysis of this final chapter, I would like to view the BibleZine as its readers experience it: as a single text. I am deliberately combining the two distinct parts of *Revolve* because the publisher and editors have claimed these two textual elements are meant to operate simultaneously with reading the actual biblical text.

Whether they would acknowledge it or not, the editors are employing Burke's theories of estrangement and identification in their creation of *Revolve*. When they initiated this publishing project, the editors first pinpointed a division present in their audience: the estrangement between teenage girls and the text of the Bible. One of *Revolve*'s editors, Laurie Whaley, describes the prompting of the project: "We asked teen girls how often they read the Bible . . . the response that came back was, 'Well, we don't read the Bible.' They said, 'It's just too freaky, too intimidating. It doesn't make any sense'" (Libaw). Thus the BibleZine format of *Revolve* was created as a means to overcome this alienation of young readers to the biblical text.

In addition, the editors have also stated that the intention behind their creation is to show "there's a positive connotation with the Bible" (Tennant) by "mak[ing] the Word of God exciting, relevant and fun for young women again" (R. Holland). When an editor responded to a question concerning *Revolve*'s choice of format, she replied: "God is not at all opposed to a fashion magazine or its format. All we have done is said that teen girls are reading magazines, so we're going to put the Bible into the format of a magazine. We have removed the obstacle of the black-leather packaging" (Solomon). While it is true that the editors may have removed "the obstacle of the black-leather packaging," they have replaced that "obstacle" with a text whose values run contrary to its primary source.

For example, before *Revolve*'s audience has a chance to read the first chapter of the Gospel of Matthew – arguably the first page of the New Testament – they are directed to an introduction to the New Testament, entitled "This Bible is a Survival Guide" (vi). This beginning segment is where the editors provide a justification of sorts – on a weak hermeneutical basis – for how they have constructed *Revolve*. This is also where the shaping process of the reader's spiritual identity begins; the editors may claim that this introduction is meant to aid the reading of the biblical text, but instead this feature really starts the conditioning process of their audience to submit to the ideology of the editors:

When you read the Bible, any part of it, understand the big picture. Understand why that book was written, what that writer was trying to accomplish. What were the people involved struggling with? What were they trying to make sense of? Each book has an **Introduction** written specifically to help answer these kinds of questions.

There are other special features to help you get as deep inside the Bible as you can.

Blabs are question and answers with experts on a variety of topics important to you every day. **Promises** point out the commitments that God makes to us. **Radical Faith** notes push us to trust God in the extreme. **Learn It and Live It** give real-life application of tons of Bible verses. **Bible Bios** tell the stories of real-life girls who lived during the Bible times. **Beauty Secrets** show ways that you can beautify your inner-self. There are notes on **Relationships** and **Issues** that you deal with daily. **Guys Speak Out!** give you the opinion of real-life teen guys on questions you wonder about. There's just a ton of info for you to learn from.

It's all here – truth, inspiration, bottom-line *actual reality*. Are you up for the challenge? [all emphasis in original](vi)

Here is where the obscuring of *Revolve*'s special features with the biblical text begins.

Throughout the BibleZine, these features are promoted, treated as important in and of themselves, and supposedly express the guidance of God in helping girls to “get as deep inside the Bible as you can” – yet there is no indication that they turn the reader toward the actual text of the New Testament. In fact, the “ton of info for you to learn from” is not referring to any part of the Bible, but instead the special features found in the BibleZine. The editors of *Revolve* may label their Bible as a “survival guide,” but in reality, they position *Revolve*'s additional features as the tools that are meant to help girls cope: segments that range from the “expert” advice of the Blab columns to the notes on Relationships and Issues “that you deal with daily.”

Even as the editors supposedly encourage their readers to “understand the big picture” of the Bible, they are instead promoting the introduction segments that accompany each book of the New Testament. Keep in mind that these prefaces are the interpretations of the editors, and by pointing their readers in this direction, the editors are encouraging them to embrace an extra feature of *Revolve* (again, composed of the editors' perspectives and opinions) **before** considering the book of the Bible that foregrounds it. Before girls read the first verse of the

New Testament, the editors are already pushing them to identify with editorial perspectives before considering the biblical text.

The introductory section closes with the claim “It’s all here – truth, inspiration, bottom-line *actual reality*,” a statement that implicitly links “truth, inspiration,” and “reality” not to the passages of the New Testament, but instead to the contributions of the editors found in these special features. Both implicitly and explicitly, the “inspiration” and sanction of the Bible is transferred onto these added-on features.. By transferring biblical authority to the supposed “bottom-line *actual reality*” of *Revolve*’s sidebars, the editors increase the perceived value of the opinions and perspectives expressed in the segments of “Blabs,” “Guys Speak Out!” and “Learn It and Live It,” giving them a divine weight of truth.

To return to Kenneth Burke and his theory of identification, it is apparent that the editors of *Revolve* are purposefully using the features of a fashion magazine as a strategy to draw their audience into engaging with the message of *Revolve*. All of this is done to supposedly overcome that “freaky” and “intimidating” estrangement of young girls to the traditional format of the Bible. While the BibleZine format helps girls get over their initial alienation, the editors then use audience’s attraction to the extra features of *Revolve* as a means to influence them in a certain direction.

Here is also where courtship first comes into play. Rather than pointing girls in the direction of embracing the text (and values) of the Bible itself, the audience is instead encouraged to consider the magazine-like features of the BibleZine as ways of “[helping] you get as deep inside the Bible as you can.” This marks the first shift of hierarchies – rather than girls being helped to ascend toward a closer relationship with God, they are instead directed toward viewing the features of *Revolve* as the main means of transcending their estrangement.

According to rhetorical critics like Edwin Black, all texts exert “the pull of an ideology,” inviting us “not just to believe, but to become something” (“Second Persona” 165, 172). The case of *Revolve* is especially instructive, since it is aimed at exploiting the unquestioning faith of its youthful readers. Exploiting youthful insecurities in order to sell magazines is not a new strategy; all traditional fashion magazines do the same. But the marketing genius of *Revolve* is to bind its advice to a spiritual order of values. The advice of a fashion magazine may be easy to discount, but it is more difficult for a faithful audience to disregard the same precepts if they’re

aligned with the Bible. An important question to be answered is what worldview are the readers being asked to assume and embrace as they read *Revolve*?

As the New Testament of *Revolve* unfolds, readers are encouraged to link the desires and values of the fashion and glamour world to aspects of their personal faith. The dishonest transfer of values (the superficial to the spiritual) reflects the drive of courtship present in the BibleZine. This transfer of desire is most noticeable within the “Beauty Secrets” segment. Here readers are given various makeup and appearance advice that is deliberately associated with spiritual concepts. While there is a weak attempt to link these “beauty secrets” to a sense of inner beauty, for the most part, these tips are just another trivial attempt to influence the audience through a familiar magazine format. In getting girls to associate routine and mundane tasks with the divine, the editors shape their audience’s perspective of what is required in a spiritual relationship.

A few examples of the converging of the superficial world with the divine are found in references to spiritualized forms of everyday products such as sunscreen, lipstick, and makeup foundation:

TIME WITH GOD: As you apply your sunscreen, use that time to talk to God. Tell him how grateful you are for how he made you. Soon, you’ll be so used to talking to him, it might become as regular and familiar as shrinking your pores.
(5)

LIPSTICK: What do people think when they hear your name? Gossip ... Know-it-all ... Kindhearted ... Compassionate ... Make sure your life reflects your beliefs. One way people know what you believe is by listening to you talk. Make sure you keep your speech pure. Imagine putting on “spiritual lipstick” every morning in preparation for the day’s conversations. (199)

APPLYING FOUNDATION: You need a good, balanced foundation for the rest of your makeup, kinda like how Jesus is the strong foundation in our lives. Keep him as the base, and build everything on him. If it doesn’t fit in his plan for you, it will fall off the foundation. Everything else will fit where it needs to go. (286)

These segments of *Revolve* show readers that their religious faith does not need to be an inconvenient element of their everyday lifestyle. Not only does the audience of teenage girls have the Bible written with the easily readable language³ and features of a fashion magazine, but they can now fit various spiritual disciplines in with their daily makeup routine.

Talking to God is likened to “shrinking your pores” or the process of applying makeup foundation, and girls are encouraged to put on their “spiritual lipstick” before leaving the house in the morning. As the audience embraces this type of advice, the thoughts of the editors invade their own, resulting in some far-reaching implications. This type of superficial-as-spiritual advice displays a relationship with God that is diminished into a kind of Christianized materialism, which accords beauty routines the same intrinsic value as devout spiritual practice.⁴ Because the audience is led to imbue these special features with the same authority they would give to the biblical text, these kinds of passages will exert a huge influencing effect on how *Revolve*’s readers view their faith and themselves, both now and in the future.

Another extra feature that helps to reinforce a particular audience identity are the inclusion of seventy-three different “Didya Know” statistics. These statistics were initially discussed in Chapter One. The stats are scattered throughout the pages of the New Testament, and cover a range of subjects: from surveying teens’ personal spirituality [“In a given week, 75% of young adults report praying.” (75)], discussing social issues [“Teen mothers are less likely to finish high school and more likely to end up on welfare than their peers.” (172)] to covering teens’ relational issues [“4 in 5 teens would confide in their parents if they had a serious

¹*Revolve* uses the New Century Version (NCV) as its translation of choice. This version is owned by Thomas Nelson, Inc., who markets it as a translation that allows the Bible to “clearly, accurately, and eternally reach [readers’] hearts in a way they can easily comprehend.” The translation was adapted for adults from the earlier published International Children’s Bible; the vocabulary for the NCV is established at a 5.6 grade reading level. It was first published in 1991. For more information on this particular translation, visit the publisher’s website at <[http://www.thomasnelson.com/consumer/dept.asp?dept_id=11370 &TopLevel_id=120000](http://www.thomasnelson.com/consumer/dept.asp?dept_id=11370&TopLevel_id=120000)> or <http://www.thomasnelson.com/consumer/dept.asp?dept_id=1117932&TopLevel_id=100000>. Accessed July 21, 2008.

²Another aspect of these “beauty secrets” worth noting are the subtle suggestions to girls as to what should constitute as part of their daily routine. As girls are encouraged to put on their “spiritual lipstick” every morning and are reminded of the importance of a good makeup foundation, the beauty secrets subversively reinforce the importance of wearing makeup every day. This focus on outward appearance is but another example of *Revolve*’s focus on superficial values rather than spiritual.

problem.” (98)]. Presumably, each new edition of *Revolve* will include an “updated” statistics feature, which seems contradictory to the original purpose of the Bible. Many view the biblical text and its principles as unchanging; the inclusion of these statistics adds an unnecessary sense of transiency to the New Testament. And yet, because the editors have already made a concerted effort to link *Revolve*’s sidebars to the same unquestioning authority as the Bible, these statistics may also transfer a sense of ephemerality to the words and message of scripture.

Thus, I believe that there are deeper implications involved in how this “Didya Know” feature subtly shapes the reader’s spiritual identity; first, there are deliberate choices made by the editors in which statistics are included, in addition to the assumptions that are made and then verified by these selected figures. The stats are not linked to the surrounding passages of the New Testament, and most telling of all, none of the chosen statistics are backed by any verifiable source. In fact, the very inclusion of these statistics in a Bible marks the turn in *Revolve* toward propagandistic appeals. The unethical appeals of propaganda are marked by their over-reliance on emotions, which is usually at the expense of any rational appeals of the text. Propaganda will avoid any examination of its message, because the propagandist is more interested in manipulating his audience into an extreme identification with a group or ideology. In fact, critic Robert Heath saw the process of propaganda as “a form of mass courtship” (226). In the case of *Revolve*, this assertion makes sense. Not only are the editors looking to secure future consumers to buy future BibleZines, but they are also looking to shape their readers’ approach to spirituality. The editors attempt to merge the desires generated by a fashion magazine with the readers’ desires of authentic spirituality, and the end result leads *Revolve*’s audience toward an editorially-manipulated “ultimate” end.

By manipulating certain emotional appeals, propaganda “is [the] expression of opinions or actions of other individuals or groups deliberately designed to influence opinions or actions of other individuals or groups with reference to predetermined ends” (*The Fine Art of Propaganda* 15). While this definition may sound similar to the traditional definition of rhetoric, keep in mind that this concept was articulated in the days before the word “propaganda” had many of the negative political connotations that it possesses today. In fact, unethical propaganda is differentiated from what was termed “socially desirable views and proposals” as the latter “will not suffer from examination, [while] the opposite type will be detected and revealed for what it is” (*The Fine Art of Propaganda* 15). In 1937, the “Institute for Propaganda Analysis” (IPA) and

its director, Clyde R. Miller, composed a list of seven propaganda devices that could be used to unethically influence an audience (*The Fine Art of Propaganda* 15).

Propaganda is also said to “work most effectively at those times when we are too lazy to think for ourselves” (Miller 261). While the editors would never admit to it, they encourage girls to not think for themselves, due to the format and visual presentation of the BibleZine. Not only are girls directed to embrace certain interpretations of various biblical passages, but their perspectives are also shaped by linking the content of the special features to the veracity of the biblical text. This linkage with the “truth” of the Bible gives the editors a special positioning to reach their audience. Within the “Didya Know” statistics of *Revolve*, there is evidence of three of the seven propaganda devices as described by Miller and the IPA – adding to the rhetorically unbalanced and unethical stance of the BibleZine.

The first tool of propaganda used in *Revolve* is the “band wagon” device. Miller describes this propaganda strategy as a way of encouraging an audience to “follow the crowd” by appealing to the different commonalities shared by its members (*The Fine Art of Propaganda* 105). Given the vulnerability of *Revolve*’s audience of young teenage girls, this appeal is one that would be the most effective, as young girls are always attempting to “fit in” with their peers. Band wagon appeals could be perceived as extreme examples of overcoming individual estrangement by forming manipulated group identifications, and are obviously a perversion of any legitimate attempts to form consubstantiality between individuals. As with all propaganda appeals, the key to differentiating between legitimate and propagandistic appeals is found in by examining the authorial intentions behind the communication.

Several of the statistics in *Revolve* serve to condition readers into thinking that “everybody’s doing it” and thus convince them to follow whatever worldview or attribute the statistic conveys. A few of these examples are

56% of young adults say their faith is very important in their life. (26)

4 in 5 teens think their parents are as cool or cooler than their friends’ parents.
(105)

63% of teens who have had sex say they wish they had waited. (137)

These statistics are just a few within *Revolve* that are meant to inspire a new sense of normalcy for the reader. If it is true that the majority of teens are considered spiritual, think their parents are cool, and are regretful of their past sexual experiences, then readers can adjust their behaviors

accordingly to fit themselves into such approved molds. Courtship also applies here, as girls are encouraged to “follow the crowd” in reaching the ideal by embracing these particular behaviors/views. In appealing to the individuals’ desires to follow the crowd and break the sense of division they feel, the band wagon appeals of the “Didya Know” feature help create an audience awareness of what the “*Revolve* girl” identity entails.

A second propaganda device found in the statistics is through the technique of “card stacking.” Card stacking “involves the selection and use of facts or falsehoods, illustrations or distractions, and logical or illogical statements in order to give the best or the worst possible case for an idea, program, person or product” (*The Fine Art of Propaganda* 95). There are several examples of cherry-picked statistics which employ either overemphasis and underemphasis of fact, illustrating the use of card stacking appeals in *Revolve*:

African American teens are 40% more likely to have had sex than Caucasian teens. (116)

Approximately 1/3 of young smokers will die of smoking-related diseases. (140)
37,000 teenagers die every year. (156)

Teens who smoke are more likely to become drug abusers. (185)

The first statistic concerning African American teens is particularly disturbing, especially when considering the composition of *Revolve*’s audience. This statistic makes an enthymematic connection by its reinforcing of a negative stereotype of a particular people group (in this case, a racial minority). It is meant to strengthen the “in” group mentality of “us,” not “them.” If readers can assume that these statistics are “true,” “inspired,” and connected in some way to the word of God, then the effect of statistics like these are both unethical and detrimental to the audience.

The other statistics above are meant to intimidate and frighten the reader into seeing a connection of elements that may not be true. For example, the assertion that “Approximately 1/3 of young smokers will die of smoking-related diseases” shows the audience the consequences of smoking by reminding them of their own mortality and susceptibility to dangerous lifestyles. But this statistic is intentionally vague as to when or how these “young smokers” will die due to smoking habits. The card stacking propaganda appeal either over- or under-emphasizes the facts, relying on the audience to make an enthymematic connection of elements that may or may not be true.

The other propaganda technique used in the “Didya Know” statistics is the inferred appeal of “transfer.” Transfer occurs when “the authority, sanction, and prestige of something respected and revered [is shifted] over to something else in order to make the latter acceptable” (*The Fine Art of Propaganda* 69). It has already been mentioned in my analysis, several times, the editorial move to connect the words of the special features to the authority of the Bible, which is in itself a propaganda appeal.

Regarding the use of the statistics in *Revolve*, these types of figures typically transmit a type of intellectual authority when encountered in other texts; yet this authoritative effect is doubled when these statistics appear within the pages of a Bible – a text usually considered to be a revered spiritual authority. Granted, while the statistics found in *Revolve* do not have any listed sources to back up their claims, the target audience of *Revolve* is not likely to question their truthfulness. The readers’ willing suspension of disbelief that is given over to the matters of faith positions them to be influenced by whatever information they encounter in the BibleZine. As such, these statistics place additional pressures on readers to conform to a particular code of behavior, as part of the developing vision of *Revolve*.

To label what is happening in *Revolve* as “propaganda” could be perceived as a drastic critique to make, but the discussion here shows how the word applies to many of the dishonest appeals of the BibleZine. In fact, the word “propaganda” was first used in relation to the evangelistic efforts of the Roman Catholic Church, as it “propagated for the faith” during the seventeenth century (“Propaganda”). *Revolve* also is functioning as an evangelistic tool – but its faith relies more on a propagandistic courtship of restricting or scaring girls into obedience.

The courtship of *Revolve*’s audience continues in the construction of what critic Edwin Black has termed an “implied auditor,” separate from the actual audience. This implied auditor takes audience construction a step further, and “focuses instead on the discourse alone, and extracts from it the audience it implies” (Black *Second Persona* 164). In other words, the implied auditor is the audience envisioned as authors construct their work. In *Revolve*’s case, this would refer to the editorial construct of an ideal audience, manufactured with the hopes that young girls will embrace the new proposed identity in an attempt to overcome any estrangement they may already feel in relation to their faith.

Awareness of this implied auditor helps the “critic [to] see in the auditor implied by a discourse a model of what the rhetor would have his real auditor become”(Black *Second Persona*

166). This projected “model” of what the actual audience should “become” merits an appraisal of what types of rhetorical appeals are at work and why; within *Revolve*, we have already seen this principle at work.

For instance, the “Blab” question-and-answer feature I discuss in Chapter Two reveals a manufactured relationship between the editors and audience, where the supposed questions from *Revolve*’s readers are really just the creation of the BibleZine’s editors. The advice column’s purpose is to influence readers’ behaviors in a particular direction. Using the devices of footing and hard and soft rhetoric, the advisor of Blab is able to position advice in a particular way, giving the readers both implicit and explicit admonitions of acceptable behavior. *Revolve*’s readers are constantly reminded of what they “should” or “should not” do; a representative example of this type of admonishment is found below:

- Q. Am I a bad person? I have been going out with this one guy for a while, but he is not a Christian.
- A. Dating a nonbeliever is like playing with fire. God wants Christians to marry other Christians, and since dating often leads to marriage, it’s best not to get involved in a love relationship with someone who doesn’t care about God. It’s time for you to make a choice between God and this guy.
- (21)

The above dialogue is just one example of the editorial pressure on girls to believe and behave in a particular way. Black states that a text can evoke a “vector of influence,” which inspires the audience to “look to the discourse they are attending for cues that tell them how they are to view the world, even beyond the expressed concerns, the overt propositional sense, of the discourse” (Black *Second Persona* 165). There are several of these “cues” in the above exchange; these cues also indicate the allure of courtship, as girls work to scale hierarchy toward a higher level of spirituality, as determined by the editors. Notice how the advisor’s response escalates the reader’s situation by pressuring her into an ultimatum of “mak[ing] a choice between God and this guy.” The dehortative admonition here is to not “play with fire” and avoid being involved with someone who does not share your beliefs. The warning “dating often leads to marriage” is also worth observing in this reply, as a recurring theme of *Revolve* relates the process of teenage dating to the adult act of marriage. Considering the target audience of the

BibleZine (12 to 15 year old girls), here is an overt attempt by the editors to influence their readers beyond the initial reading of *Revolve*.

In fact, nearly every special feature of *Revolve* is intended – in some way – to direct the audience’s behavior in a particular way, as directed by the editorial decrees of the extra features. Black addresses this level of authorial influence and writes that in all rhetorical discourses, “we can find enticements not simply to believe something, but to *be* something. We are solicited by the discourse to fulfill its blandishments with our very selves” (Black *Second Persona* 172). *Revolve*’s readers are not just encouraged to accept or approve of the ideas presented within the BibleZine, but are instead goaded into becoming a particular type of person. This blatant prodding of identity reveals the prevalent role of courtship within *Revolve*’s pages.

The proposed identity for the readers is ultimately exemplified by one particular “top ten list”:

The Top Ten Random Things to Know About Being a *Revolve* Girl

- 01 Revolve girls don’t call guys.
- 02 Revolve girls don’t talk with food in their mouths.
- 03 Revolve girls have good posture.
- 04 Revolve girls are not argumentative.
- 05 Revolve girls should never gossip.
- 06 Revolve girls know their bodies are temples of God.
- 07 Revolve girls are respectful of others.
- 08 Revolve girls enjoy spending time with family.
- 09 Revolve girls don’t kiss and tell.
- 10 Revolve girls are fabulous friends. (265)

This list is a clear indication of the push of *Revolve*’s editors to craft their readers’ identity. Behind the flippant appeal of a “random” top ten list lies a not-so-covert attempt to encode behavior for the BibleZine’s audience. The named qualities are representative of many of the running themes of *Revolve*, which constitute an ideologically-conservative code of behavior for girls to follow.

The goal here is not to reveal the “top ten” ways to become a better Christian, but to explain the ten ways to best emulate what it means to be a “*Revolve* girl.” Readers are literally branded by the product’s name (“*Revolve* girl”) in their pursuit of scaling the lower levels of the

spiritual hierarchy toward the top, as established by the BibleZine's editors. Robert Heath could have been describing this process when he wrote: "by transforming the key terms we use to describe ourselves, we create new identities. We become someone else insofar as we think of ourselves according to a new name and with it take on a new set of perceptions and motivations" (Heath 210).

This chapter has discussed the many ways the content of *Revolve* influences the reader, not only when it comes to her future buying preferences of Bibles, but also in creating a type of identity for her to follow when it comes to her approach to spirituality. These implications cannot be overlooked, as they represent a rhetorically-unbalanced, propagandistic approach to communicating a supposed "spiritual" message. If *Revolve* can claim the authority of a Bible, and yet describe itself as simply "an inspirational and motivational Bible product," it is extremely important to examine all the ways its messages could affect vulnerable readers (Tennant).

CONCLUSION: The Medium Becomes the Message: The Impact of Pop Culture Christianity

In a recent survey of the “religious landscape” of the United States, 78.4% of the 35,000 respondents identified themselves as members of a Christian faith tradition (Pew Forum). This majority translates into a consumer base that religious publishers not only pursue to buy their products, but also who they also seek to secure future brand loyalty. Key to achieving this goal is to lure young religious consumers into embracing a certain product line. So in 2003, when an editor of Thomas Nelson, Inc. proposed the idea of combining the text of the Bible with the formatting of a fashion magazine, her idea was embraced as a “savvy marketing idea” rather than unorthodox heresy (Radosh 65). Thus, the creation of *Revolve: The Complete New Testament*, the first issue in a publishing line of BibleZines.

This Bible accommodates the materialistic expectations of its young audience, usually at the expense of the original biblical message it is supposedly “updating.” Despite the editorial claim that the magazine layout of *Revolve* aids the reader by providing “further-study notes” in a “relevant language and format!” for the New Testament, my analysis in Chapter One illustrates how the extra features instead distract the audience from the text of the Bible, borrowing a sacred sanction for the more profane purpose of securing the market segment of young teenagers. The relationship between the editors and audience is then cemented with a footing that offers a kind of mock friendship through which an advisor in an advice column presumes an authority to offer intimate counsel. Chapter Two demonstrates that in accepting the advisor’s admonitions, readers are also led tacitly to adopt a particular worldview that accompanies the offered advice. Chapter Three reveals the unethical motivations behind *Revolve*’s content as it manipulates the young audience’s desires to overcome their cultural and spiritual estrangement. Rather than encouraging girls to aspire to a better understanding of the biblical text, the hierarchy is shifted to promote ascent toward editorially-determined ideal female behaviors.

Therefore, reading *Revolve* has larger implications for its teenaged audience than simply an encounter with another magazine off the newsstand. When biblical content is combined with the format of a fashion magazine, the end result is a trivializing of the New Testament. In fact,

the moment when the editors of *Revolve* decided to merge the words of the Bible with the layout of a magazine, they also decided to sacrifice the spiritual message of their holy book. The medium of a fashion magazine automatically negates any meaningful lessons of the Bible, since “in operational and practical fact, the medium is the message” (McLuhan 23). Without a doubt, the chosen medium of a message has the power to constrain or shape the way in which it is perceived by the audience. In the BibleZine format, the priorities of fashion and glamour forcefully converge with religious perspectives – and as a result, most of the values in this “New Testament” reflect convenience, disposability, trendiness, and appearance at the expense of more traditional spiritual preoccupations such as self-examination, contemplation, and reflection. The values and priorities of the two genres are incompatible, and as a result, *Revolve* provokes a conditioning effect on its readers that will have a far-reaching influence on how they approach spirituality, both now and in the future.

Revolve, of course, is not a Bible at all, but rather it is a fashion magazine that has found a way to exploit biblical authority and sanction. This duplicity makes the BibleZine an ethically questionable discourse. *Revolve* boldly presents itself as something that it is not, and in the process, makes it difficult for its audience to dismiss its claims. It combines the exploitation of its readers’ naive faith with manipulation of their youthful insecurities and lack of knowledge. These qualities place the audience of *Revolve* in a unique position to be heavily influenced by the messages of what they encounter within the pages of the BibleZine. The editorial drive to enforce their conservative ideologies comes not from a desire to see their readers become more ethical and devout individuals, but instead to encourage behavioral conformity for their audience of young impressionable girls. The time to influence these young readers is now, since George Barna, an influential religious pollster, has noted that “[w]hat you believe at age 13 is pretty much what you’re going to die believing” (John W. Kennedy).

It was this drive to recruit young believers, at any cost, which originally inspired me to choose *Revolve* as an artifact of study for my Master’s thesis. When I first read about the BibleZine in the fall of 2003, I was immediately intrigued by *Revolve*’s forceful blending of pop culture with traditional Christianity. As someone who grew up in the Bible-belt of the American South, I share a past affinity with much of *Revolve*’s target audience. Initially I sought to examine what in this new Bible translation made it so appealing and popular among its teenaged audience. Admittedly, when I started my analysis, I thought the editorial intentions in

the BibleZine may have been superficial, but essentially harmless. Yet as my examination intensified, I started finding more and more covert and unethical appeals that were masked in the “modernized” look and features of the contemporary magazine format.

As I analyzed more of editorial content in the extra features of *Revolve*, I found the evangelistic zeal move away from helping young girls understand the biblical text better to instead actively encourage readers to conform to the ideals of a very conservative, restrictive, and frankly, sexist ideology. It was this nefarious perspective that disturbed me the most in my research, bothering me more than the publisher’s financial motivations of securing readers to buy their future BibleZines.

As my discussion on *Revolve* draws to a close, I know that there are many avenues of investigation still left to be pursued in this area of research. BibleZines represent one small facet of Christian pop culture, and a larger critique is not only inviting, but necessary. There are far more rhetorical, cultural, and spiritual repercussions to be uncovered as items like *Revolve* become mainstays in the market and “religious landscape” of today.

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